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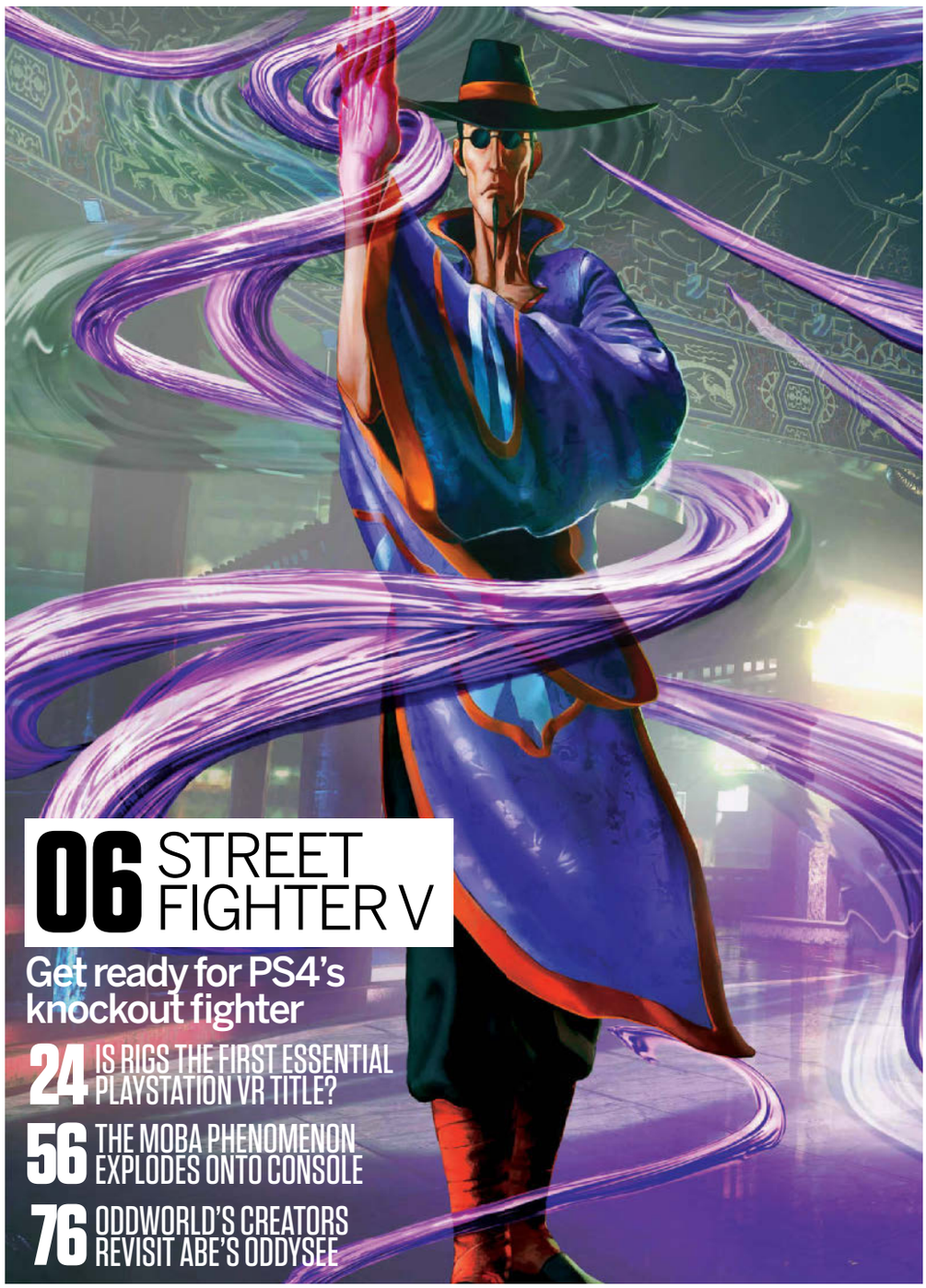
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Get ready for PS4's knockout fighter

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OKAY, TEN POINTS!



ONE TELLTALE SIGN that a game is a shining example of its genre is if it manages not only to hook you with its own content but also get you excited to play similar games again. After a few months of playing *SFV* on and off, my love for fighting games has been fully rekindled – one recent weekend saw practically every waking hour dedicated to virtual sparring with friends, taking in everything from the classics (*Street Fighter III*, *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*) to more recent releases like *SoulCalibur V* and *Tekken Tag 2* as we honed our skills in preparation for *SFV*'s arrival.

So while my 'solo' gaming time might still be going into an online RPG I seem incapable of shutting up about, any excuse to grab a friend and a couple of sticks is being taken right now. Lunchtime? Cool, chuck *Guilty Gear* on. Work finished for the day? "Stick around, let's play some *BlazBlue*." *Street Fighter V* has managed to generate some serious hype not just in me but most of our office as well, and even those who have no idea what they're watching will often stick around to check out a match or two.

Capcom did an amazing job of exhuming the 2D fighting genre with *Street Fighter IV* almost a decade ago (!), and I'm amazed that it seems to have found a way to take the genre to the next level with *SFV*. Online tests, drip-fed information on new and returning characters, radical changes to designs and fighting styles... it's all come together to build hype for what stands to be the biggest and best fighter on PS4 and, having played the hell out of the game already, I can safely say that the buzz is entirely justified.

And it's only going to get better, too. With new characters, stages, costumes, modes and Gill-knows what else set to be added after launch, what we're playing right now is just the start of something *way* bigger. Bring. It. On.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see ya online...

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EDITOR
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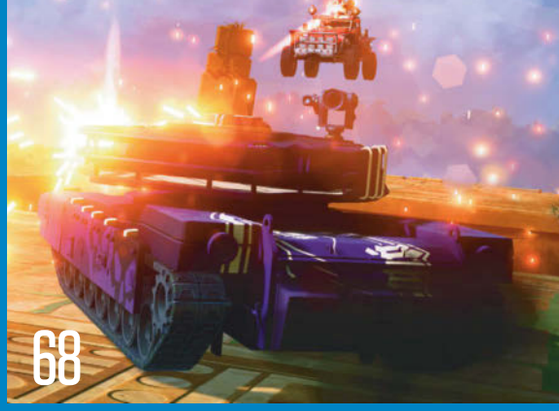
"You did quite well, but you need more training to defeat me!"

06
STREET FIGHTER V
PlayStation 4's finest fighter put through its paces

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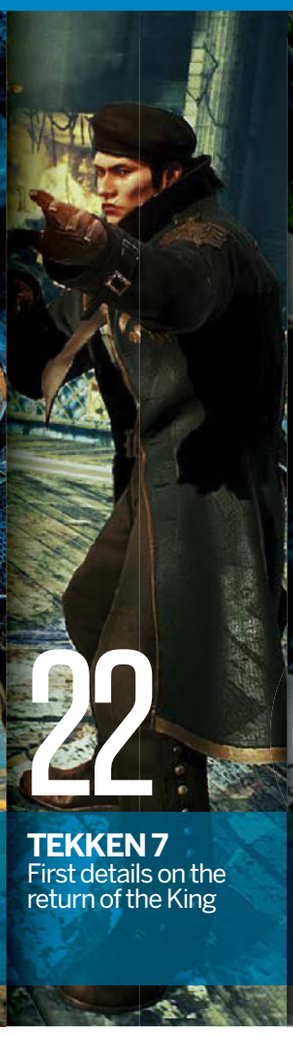








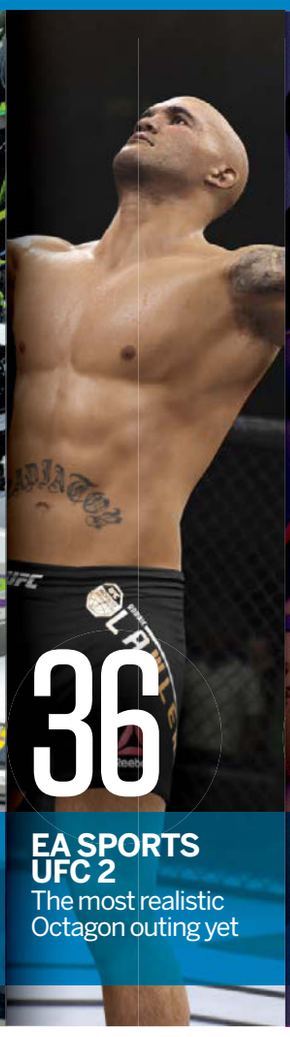
DARK SOULS III
Everything you need to know



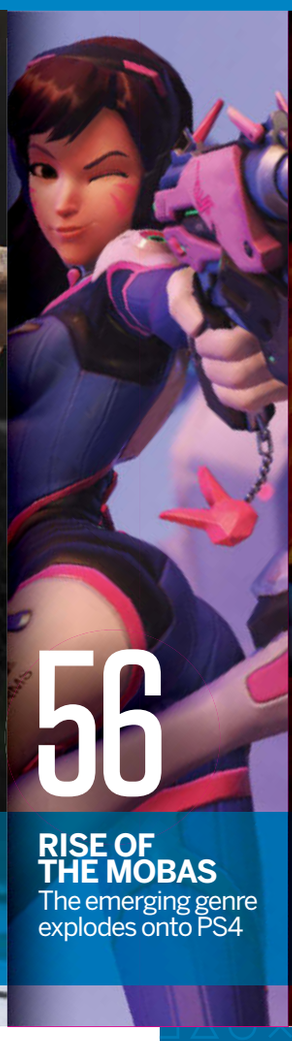
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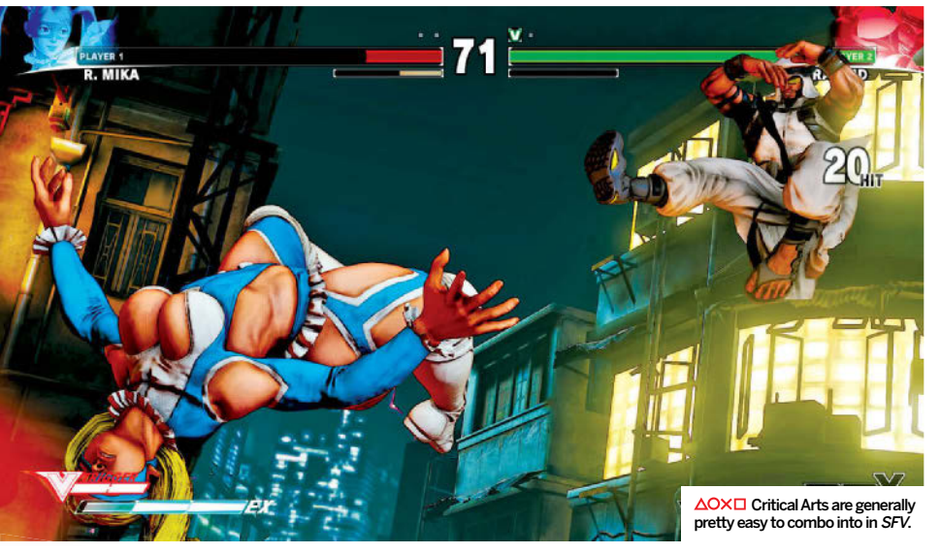
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ONO SAID KNOCK YOU OUT

We throw down with **Street Fighter V** producer Yoshinori Ono to discuss PS4's first heavyweight exclusive of 2016 and its place in the growing eSports scene...

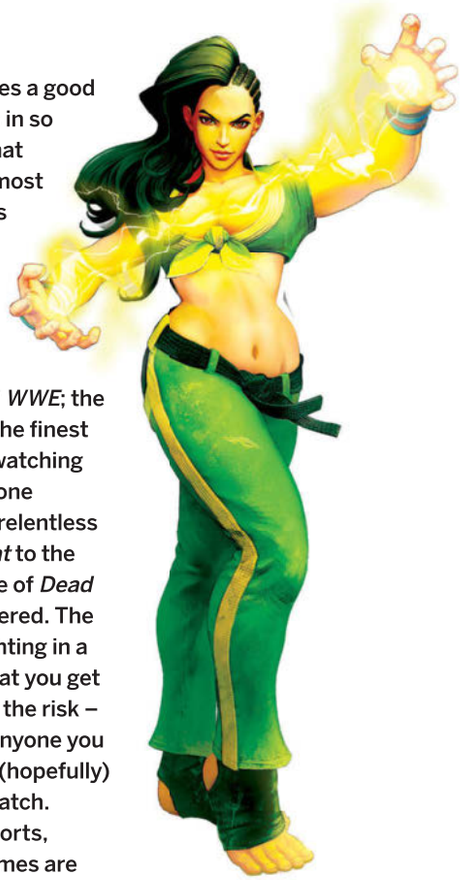




△○×□ Critical Arts are generally pretty easy to combo into in *SFV*.



△○×□ Ono is one of the most playful devs in the business.



Pretty much everyone loves a good fight. Violence just comes in so many different flavours that unless you're among the most devout of pacifists, there's bound to be some kind of brawling out there that tickles your fancy. The bone-crunching reality of MMA to the pantomime buffoonery of *WWE*; the perfect choreography of the finest in martial arts movies to watching two drunken fools flap at one another in a car park; the relentless brutality of *Mortal Kombat* to the hypersexualised spectacle of *Dead Or Alive*. All bases are covered. The wonderful thing about fighting in a videogame, however, is that you get all of the thrill but none of the risk – you can pick a fight with anyone you like and win or lose, you'll (hopefully) come away without a scratch.

Even as spectator sports, fighting games are coming into their own as fidelity and freedom both improve. Last year, the biggest beat-'em-up tournament, Evo 2015, racked up almost 19 million views on Twitch over three days. The most viewed game? A little something called *Ultra Street Fighter IV*. You may have heard of it.

Amazingly, the original version of Evo's biggest crowd-puller actually launched three years before the streaming service, the game's foundations in last-gen tech meaning it could never fully embrace playing to an audience. But now, with sharing an everyday activity for many of us on PS4, it should come as little surprise that one of the biggest changes Capcom has made for *Street Fighter V* is to really try and tap into this booming market. Excitable as ever, producer Yoshinori Ono launches himself straight into the topic. "I've been so happy to see the support the fans have shown for the series, and in particular *Street Fighter IV*, in the eSports space," he beams. "We are allowing for ranked matches and rankings to be separated into groups



based on strength. After the game is out, we will be using the Capcom Fighters Network and releasing additional modes and features. Updates are also planned which will add support for real-life eSports events, as well as for online-only events. The Capcom Pro Tour and the Capcom Cup have been running for 16 years, and we will also be supporting those within *Street Fighter V* via the Capcom Fighters Network."



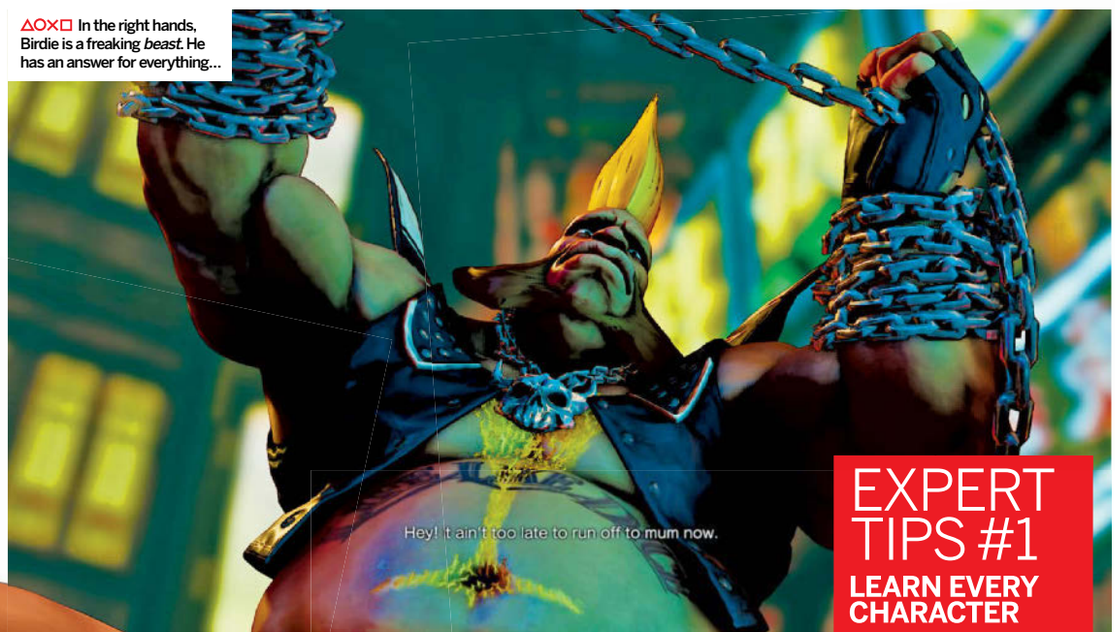
△○×□ Landing your V-Skill generates a little V-Gauge.

"THE V-SYSTEM WAS BORN OUT OF THE DESIRE TO SHOW THE INDIVIDUALITY OF EACH CHARACTER"





It's not just the online services that have been tailored for to the streaming generation, either. *SFIV*'s flashy Ultras are gone, replaced with character-specific comeback options that don't get boring after the first five or six times you see them thanks to the V-Trigger system. As your fighter takes damage (or lands their V-Skill – more on that shortly), they charge their V-Gauge and when it's full, a unique ability can be activated. Some take the form of temporary buffs, with Ryu able to charge his fireballs, Birdie granted additional damage and armour and Chun-Li getting additional hits on her normal attacks, for instance. Others are single-use tools – like Nash's teleport, Vega's rose and Rashid's towering hurricane – but even these create more personal and situational ways to extend combos than simply tagging an Ultra on the end of something big.



△○×□ In the right hands, Birdie is a freaking *beast*. He has an answer for everything...



Just as we continue to be amazed by *Alpha 3*'s custom combos and *SFIII* Yun Genei-Jin chains years after release, this system has immense potential for both players and viewers, since people will play their chosen characters in extremely different ways and we're sure to see new ways of using and abusing each of the V-Trigger abilities long after launch. The V-system also grants each character a more proactive tool in V-Skills, trademark abilities that can be used at any time and usually build V-Gauge by doing so. Some, such as Cammy's spinning back-fist or Necalli's ground pound, are effectively just special moves mapped to MP+MK,

EXPERT TIPS #1

LEARN EVERY CHARACTER

One of the great things about reverting to a smaller roster is that anyone keen to get good at *Street Fighter V* can quite easily get a feel for the entire cast without feeling overwhelmed. You don't need to learn *everything* – on a basic level, just knowing what blocked/whiffed normals and specials can be punished (and with what) will see you right, and learning how to deal with everyone's V-Triggers and V-Skills will also help hugely. An evening in training mode will probably do in terms of homework – just be sure to fill in the gaps in your knowledge and experiment as you play on.

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although others are a little more out there – Ryu's parry, Ken's run, Dhalsim's levitate and Mika's extended taunt are all examples that wouldn't fit into the usual command lists, but they all help set each fighter apart as unique.

"The V-system was really born out of the desire to express the individuality of each character within the fighting game system," Ono explains. "Our previous gameplay mechanics had the same effect for all characters, so the difference was just in the stats of each character. That meant that it took a lot of time to set and adjust (or correct) the detailed tuning of the rules. It's a big challenge to have something different for each character, but we really wanted to hit the big red 'RESET' button for this title and this is definitely something brand new. It may end up being even more work than the old system, but I think it'll be worth it."

We'd be inclined to agree, particularly since the system has already managed to make the classic match-up between Ryu and Ken – who, let's not forget, started as *identical* characters in the original game – interesting for the first time in literally decades. While Ryu remains happy to sit at mid-range and fish for pokes and short combos while parrying predictable responses, Ken's more aggressive style lets him get in the opponent's face quicker and showboat a little more when he gets there. If the V-system can give these estranged twins the tools to feel so immediately different to one another, you can probably guess how well it does in establishing identities and roles for the more inventive members of the cast. And in case you can't, we'll tell you. 'Very'. Very well indeed.

Given that each of the 16 characters now has their own unique feel and flow, it's somewhat understandable that the starting roster isn't quite so busy as in some of *SFV*'s peers. "The main theme of *Street Fighter V* for us as developers was this being a 'reset'. This also influenced our thoughts on the character roster," explains Ono. "We wanted to attract current experienced veterans, new players and also lapsed players, and we actually originally considered going all the







△○×□ Rashid is the best. We give him TEN POINTS.

EXPERT TIPS #2

LINKS AREN'T SO HARD

Links involve using the positive frames of a landed attack to follow-up with another that has a shorter start-up than the disadvantage the first strike leaves the opponent at. One-frame links were a major factor in finding most *USFIV* characters' most damaging combos, but they're gone now. Although the window is still small on the tougher links, it's much more manageable, particularly in an online environment. Work out which attacks can be chained in training mode – set the AI to guard after the first hit and only links that actually work will connect, such as crouching HP into standing MP with Rashid.





way back to the *Street Fighter II* roster size of eight characters! But thinking about it further, we realised that roster size is from an era before the spread of online communication. A fighting game isn't just about learning the moves and strategy for your own character – you need to understand the other characters as well in order to learn how to win against them. Back then, when you got all your information about characters in magazines or through word of mouth, it was all you could manage to get the information you needed about those eight characters. So considering the amount of information players would need to cover the starter roster and the availability of information and communication online today, we decided that the same starting roster size as *Street Fighter IV* was just right."

Again, we'd struggle to disagree with the logic and you only need look at the first version of any new fighter to see that this kind of character count – while modest when compared to exceptions like *Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3* or the crazy *Tekken Tag 2* – is pretty much the standard that developers shoot for. *BlazBlue* launched with just 12 characters, *Skullgirls* only had eight at launch and *Guilty Gear*, despite having had more in previous games, dialled back to 17 fighters for its glorious comeback with *Xrd*. Ono also seems keen to remind people that this number isn't the final count. "Players will learn and get used to the initial roster, so as we've already announced, we plan to continually add more characters to the roster, starting with six characters to be released throughout 2016," he says. "With this in mind, hopefully everyone out there will be able to find the character that is the perfect match for them, and can understand our reasoning for initially bringing the roster size back to basics."

After attracting criticism for its approach to adding characters to *Street Fighter IV* (the tried-and-tested '*Super*'/'*Ultra*' update method) and *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* (turns out people *really* hate on-disc DLC...), Capcom is taking a novel approach to expanding *SFV*'s roster. The rollout will seemingly be gradual rather than just dropping





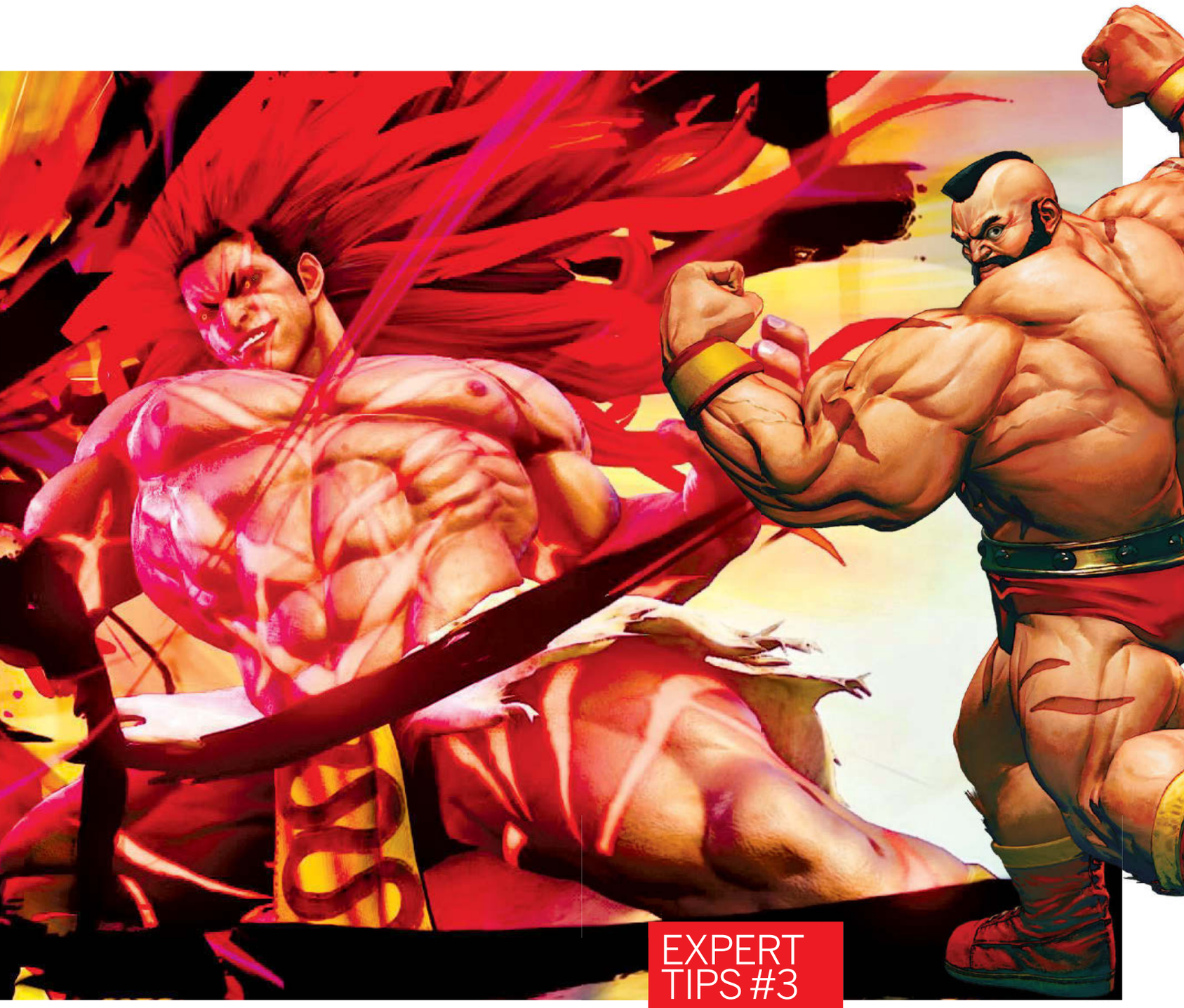




△○×□ Laura is probably the easiest new character to pick up and play.



△○×□ Presentation is superb throughout, not that we ever expected any less.



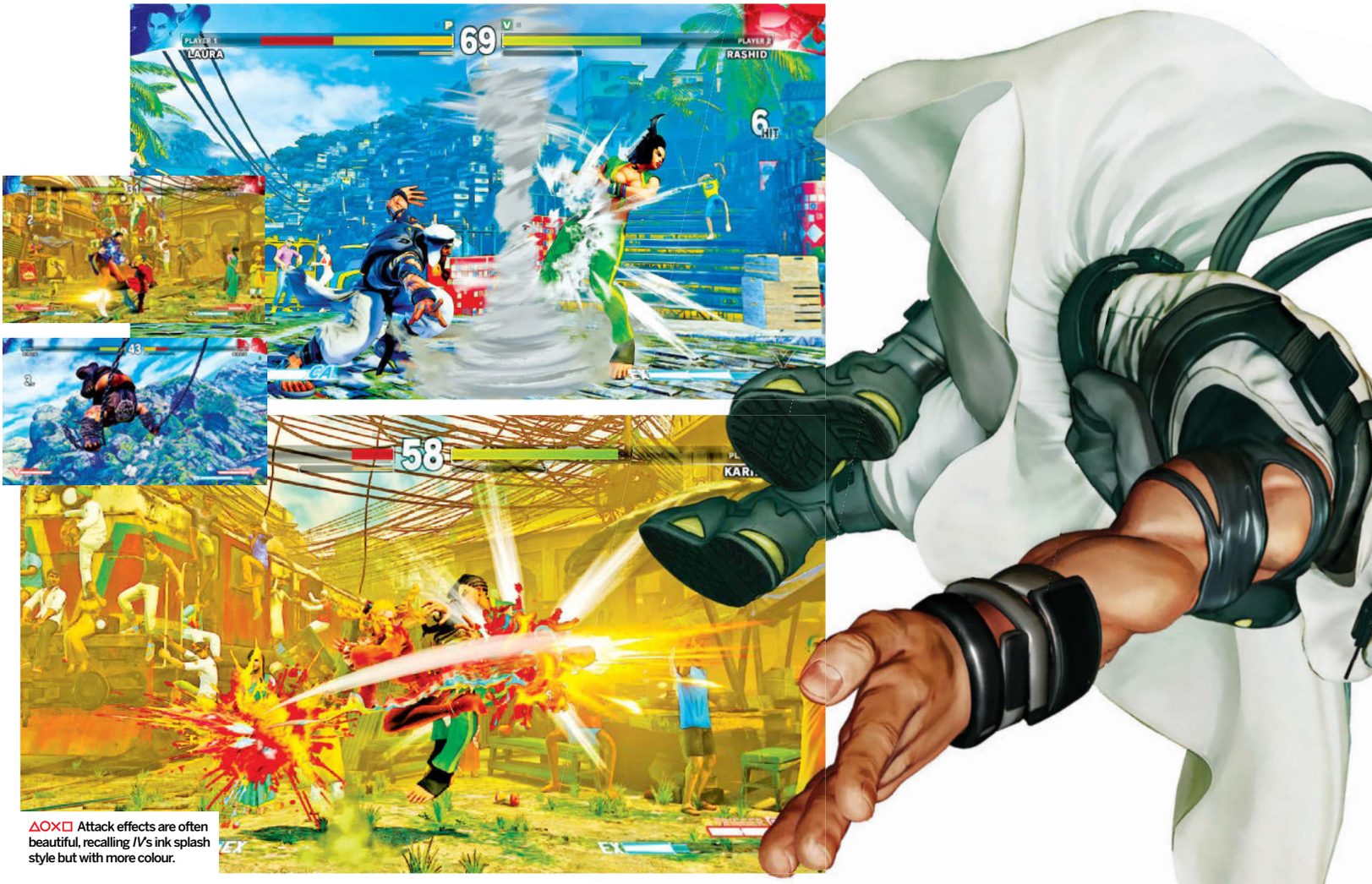
the lot in one go but, more importantly, you don't even have to pay for them. "We will be regularly updating *Street Fighter V* with new content and full details of what this includes will be released soon," Ono teases. "All content that affects gameplay will be earnable for free by acquiring the in-game Fight Money or can be purchased instantly with Zenny (real currency). Some cosmetic DLC, such as costumes, will only be available via Zenny purchase, though." When asked what he makes of fans' reactions to this system of making DLC unlockable with in-game currency, the producer makes it clear that he'd rather wait until the game is out in the wild before passing judgement, just as players should. "I think the most important thing will be how people respond to the system once they've actually got their hands on it and it's in operation," he tells us. "We've considered how to run *Street Fighter V* in a long-term fashion, and have looked into how other titles have run similar models. We'll definitely be monitoring feedback after the game is released and using it to adjust the schedule and content as we go along to better suit the needs of the players."

The growing roster is important not just to keep the game fresh, but also because it could be that you jump into *Street Fighter V* and find out that you and your former main are no longer besties. While we've praised the V-system for how well it is able to highlight and enforce differences between characters, it has also made a number or returning characters feel entirely alien. Cammy

EXPERT TIPS #3

V-TRIGGER CANCELLING

Some characters are able to cancel normal or special moves into their V-Trigger to create dangerous combos – Ken can chain two Dragon Punches, while Nash is capable of all sorts of combo-extending shenanigans. Just as you shouldn't throw out Supers recklessly, Trigger is an equally valuable tool and one that can, at least for some of the cast, perform similarly to *SFIV*'s FADC (Focus Attack Dash Cancel) in order to open opponents up to even more damage.



△○×□ Attack effects are often beautiful, recalling *IV*'s ink splash style but with more colour.

and Ryu are relatively safe but everyone else – Alpha characters in particular – plays next to nothing like you might remember. While fun and interesting in the context of *SFV* being a new game, Mika, Karin, Birdie and Nash could almost be entirely new characters were it not for the familiar names, and even the old guard aren't safe. Bison becomes a walking tank, Vega is no longer a charge character, Sagat has seemingly been kicked out of Shadaloo entirely to make way for toxic newcomer F.A.N.G and who even knows how Capcom will handle Balrog when he returns later in the year. He'll probably have a fireball. And a sword. And tank tracks. Simply put, it would take *a lot* to surprise us at this point.

"I didn't think there was any point in establishing *Street Fighter V* as a reset, and then simply bringing over characters wholesale with the same move sets and battle designs as in their *Street Fighter IV* or *Street Fighter Alpha* iterations," Ono reasons – a fair point, but it's still going to mean that some fans will need to do a bit of mingling in order to find someone they actually get on with in the new engine. "With Vega, for example, the idea of the V-system was having each character's uniqueness be fun and easy to control, and charging moves was no longer a good match for him in that sense. The battle design of all the other returning fighters has been changed in different ways that reflect these two key words of 'reset' and 'individuality'."

With an enhanced training suite to help you put both familiar faces and newcomers through their paces, though, it shouldn't be too tough to find either ways to make a former favourite work in the new system or a new character who suits your style of play. In *SFIII*, we slowly moved away from the safety of Ryu and Chun-Li only to discover that we loved how Dudley, Ibuki, Urien and Q played and again in *SFIV*, leaving behind the familiar let us experience the joys of Rufus, El Fuerte and later, Juri and Hakan. While the training wheels need to come off a little quicker now that even classic characters have been changed up considerably, we're already finding our flow with the newcomers. Rashid's mobility and control make him a force to be reckoned with, Necalli's raw power is incredibly satisfying to wield and Laura is so easy to pick up that it's hard not to click with her seemingly odd grappler/rushdown hybrid model. You may even find that you discover a fondness for a character you never thought you'd enjoy – while we struggle with Vega after putting so much time into him in *SFIV*, newcomers may slot right in and start making the claw look good right away.

EXPERT TIPS #4

BAITING THE TRAP

Mind games are a huge part of *Street Fighter*, so keep your opponent guessing. Some characters have feints for just such a reason, but even those who don't can mess with other players. As Ryu, try inputting the double fireball motion of your Super without actually pressing the button when you have full meter to make you opponent block or jump, then try to punish their response. Light specials can also do a similar job – throw out an LK hurricane kick to close distance then either throw if they're stuck blocking or block and punish their attempted counter-attack.

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"WE WANTED TO USE ONLINE TESTS AS A REPLACEMENT FOR ARCADE TESTING"

You may even already have an idea of who you want to represent based on the online tests that have been going on since last summer. While Capcom didn't make every character available during these beta sessions, most were unlocked at some point and despite various matchmaking and lag issues, your involvement in this pre-launch campaign has only helped make the final product better. "I think these are really very effective means for improving the game," Ono confirms, going on to suggest that broader testing could actually be a valid substitute for the developer's usual methods. "Certainly speaking for *Street Fighter V*, we really wanted to use the online beta tests as a replacement for the arcade testing we would normally have carried out. Japanese arcade players are extremely high-level, and in the past we've relied on their expert opinions to fine-tune *Street Fighter* games before they come to console. This time, as you know, we're not releasing an arcade version, so in addition to getting the game running at as many events as we could in order to get direct feedback from players, we ran the online beta through several phases, as well as some secret tests where we put the game live without making any announcements. All this has helped us immensely as we have been able to pick up on points for fine-tuning that we can't discover with our own internal testing alone."

So don't let the fact that the beta tests occasionally didn't work cloud your judgement. After all, that's pretty much the entire point of a beta test – to break the game in specific ways ahead of launch so that the team knows what to fix to make sure the same issues don't occur when the game actually hits the shelves. We've been playing it on-and-off for the best part of six months now and we can say with some authority that *Street Fighter V* is *excellent*. It's exactly the shot in the arm that the franchise needed, speeding things up after complaints that *SFIV* was too slow, reinventing characters who have grown slightly boring or safe over the years and nudging the game further into the eSports arena with tools that make it better for both those playing competitively and those who would rather simply watch. "I think of fighting games as tools whose true value is revealed when as many players as possible use them," Ono states in closing. "So in addition to the adjustments made before release using beta feedback, we will of course continue to improve the quality of this tool after release."



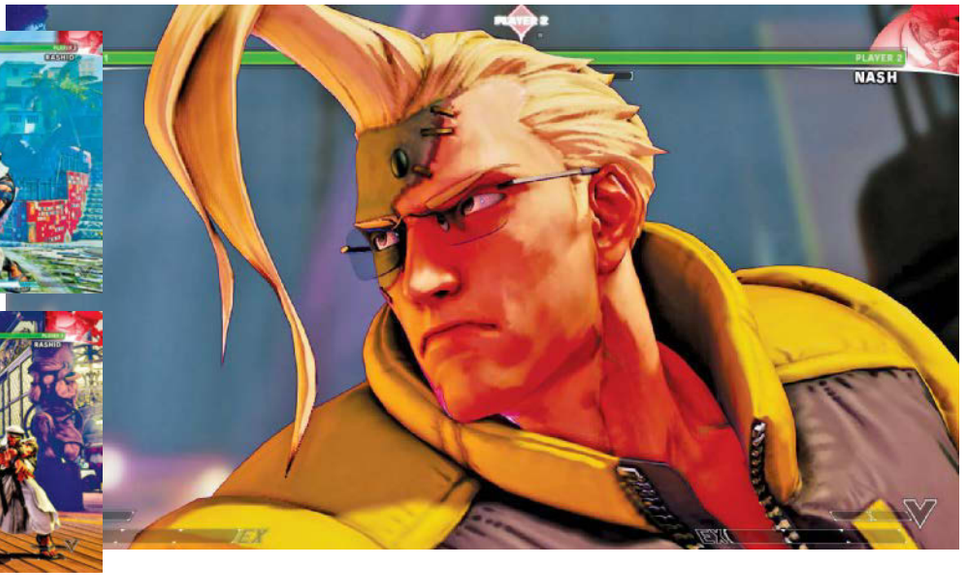
△○×□ Facing the beastly Necalli is just *terrifying*...











EXPERT TIPS #5

CHECK YOUR STATS

The Capcom Fighters Network is a valuable source of information about your strengths and weaknesses. If your stats tell you that you get hit by a lot of low attacks, that should be your cue to start blocking low; if you see your throw percentage is crazy low, you probably need to start using less predictable set-ups for your grabs and using more high/low/overhead mix-ups instead; if you're not landing your Critical Arts, this could be the kick you need to teach you to find a way to combo into them. This could prove to be one of the most useful additions to the game in terms of growing as a player, so use it!



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DARK SOULS III

With a little help from Hidetaka Miyazaki himself, we give you the lowdown on From Software's promising bleakquel

1 IT'LL BE 'POSSIBLE'

Director Hidetaka Miyazaki describing that finishing *Dark Souls III* to us as being "possible to accomplish" has to be our favourite quote about the game. "The key concept of this series is 'feeling accomplishment through overcoming difficulty'," he elaborated when we spoke with him in issue 263, "so there's no option to simply lower the difficulty. I want to keep both the possibility of accomplishment and the difficulty itself."

2 FROM SOFTWARE KNOWS PS4

Working with new hardware can always be a potential stumbling block for studios. Thankfully that wasn't the case with *Bloodborne*, but when we spoke with Miyazaki about *Dark Souls III*, he told us that From Software learnt a lot developing a game for PS4 and that the team is using that experience for *Dark Souls III*'s development. Indeed, it already looks far more polished and technically accomplished than the last two *Dark Souls* games – that's one good reason for leaving last gen behind right there.

3 BLOODBORNE IS AN INFLUENCE

Learning how to get the best out of the PS4 isn't the only impact that *Bloodborne* has had on *Dark Souls III*. You can clearly see some influence from that game in how the new *Dark Souls* plays as well. That's most evident in its faster pace. While not being as frenetic or as aggressive as *Bloodborne* can be, it is noticeably faster than the previous *Dark Souls* titles and many enemies are more tenacious to boot.

4 BATTLE ARTS ARE VITAL

One of *Dark Souls III*'s key new mechanics is the ability to perform Battle Arts. These are essentially special moves, activated by pressing L2 while two-handing weapons, that vary depending on which weapon you are using. When dual-wielding Scimitars, for example, you can perform a spinning attack that's incredibly useful when you're surrounded by enemies. With a Greatsword, you perform a lunge attack that can be chained into a huge upward strike that can send enemies flying into the air.

5 STANCES ARE A THING

Not all Battle Arts take the form of a move. Instead, some weapons have Battle Arts that put you into a stance, which then opens up the possibility for new attacks. Take the Longsword – the Battle Art for this weapon puts you into Ready Stance. From this poised position, R1 and R2 will perform new attacks, and thesee are more powerful that your average attacks and can be used to break through an opponent's guard.

6 YOU WILL FIGHT LORDS OF CINDER

Throughout the course of *Dark Souls III*, you will be fighting bosses that are Lords Of Cinder – 'people' who have sacrificed themselves to rekindle the first flame, like Gwyn from the first *Dark Souls*. When you kill one of those bosses, you get the message 'Heir Of Fire Destroyed', which has some interesting implications for the story. This could mean that you are taking out those who might be trying to rekindle the flame yet again, perhaps finally ending the cycle of light and decay and giving us closure for this chapter.

7 IT'S LOCKED AT 30FPS

There's a certain sub-section of the gaming community that throws a tantrum when a game is anything less than 60fps. We're not part of that group. Sure, it's nice to have 60fps, but when you've got a game like *Dark Souls* that's had a lot of problems when it comes to frame-rate inconsistencies in the past, we'll happily take a locked, solid, 30fps, which is what From Software has said it is going to achieve on PS4.

8 THE A-TEAM IS BACK

While *Dark Souls II* is a great game, it's no secret that many thought it fell a bit short of the quality of the first *Dark Souls*. That was perhaps somewhat inevitable, given that the 'A-Team' that made the first *Dark Souls* moved onto crafting *Bloodborne* after making the first *Dark Souls* game, leaving *Dark Souls II* in another team's hands. Now *Bloodborne* is finished, Miyazaki is back at the helm for *Dark Souls III* along with From Software's best people, doing what they can to make this the best *Souls* game in the series.



△○✕□ It's nice to have a shield back after *Bloodborne*, but we doubt we're going to be able to block attacks like that!









△○✕□ Humanity is so passé; Embers are what everyone is using these days.

9 MANAGE YOUR MANA

Along with Health and Stamina, *Dark Souls III* has a new bar for you to manage. The 'Mana bar' (as we're calling it), is consumed whenever you use spells, making it particularly important if you favour a magic-based build. Don't assume it's irrelevant if you're a melee-focused character, however: the aforementioned Battle Arts also consume the Mana gauge, making it important for all character builds.

10 YOU'VE GOT A NEW FLASK

Along with the introduction of a Mana bar, *Dark Souls III* introduces a new Estus Flask that you use to replenish your Mana. The Ash Estus Flask appears to operate in an identical way to your normal Estus Flask in that it refills at bonfires between uses. Like the normal Estus Flask, you will also be able to upgrade it so that you get more uses out of it between refills. This also hints that we will be expected to use abilities more than we're perhaps used to...

11 COVENANTS WILL CHANGE

Covenants will return in *Dark Souls III* and Miyazaki has indicated that they will be simplified in *Dark Souls III*. That's a good thing, because the fact that many people didn't understand them in previous games meant that they just ended up ignoring them. "It will be a chance to explore new situations in the simple multiplayer of co-op and invasion," Miyazaki tells us, but he says that, beyond that, he can't go into any more detail.

12 FAST TRAVEL FROM THE GET-GO

While *Dark Souls II* may not be regarded as quite on the same level as the first game, that doesn't mean *Dark Souls III* won't carry over anything from that game. A prime example of that is fast travel. In the first *Dark Souls*, you didn't unlock the ability to fast travel until halfway through the game. *DSIII*, however, will allow you to fast travel between bonfires from the start.

13 YOU WON'T HOLLOW

Reflecting the interesting story beats that we talked about relating to the Lords Of Cinder and supporting the theory that we're seeing the cycle of light and dark coming to an end is that fact that your character is no longer hollow. There is an equivalent gameplay system where you consume Embers to gain the power of a Lord Of Cinder, raising your health and opening up the ability to summon other players, just like consuming Humanity.

14 INVADE AS MUCH AS YOU WANT

The *Dark Souls* games have previously limited the amount of times that you can invade other players games by giving you consumable items that you have to use to invade (unless you jumped through a load of hoops to get the Red Eye Orb in the first *Dark Souls*). *Dark Souls III* is changing that by giving you an unlimited-use invasion item. Given that the PvP aspect of *Dark Souls* is a massive part of the game for a lot of players, we think that's a positive change.

15 SACRIFICE YOURSELF

There are rumours floating around that you'll be able to create your own bonfires in *Dark Souls III* by sacrificing yourself. We wonder whether that could make the game too easy, but perhaps it will be punished so harshly that you will use it very sparingly. Perhaps you could lose a level and lower your stats when you sacrifice yourself, for example? Or, maybe it will turn out to be nothing more than a rumour. We'll find out soon...

16 PVP IS BETTER BALANCED

What we've seen of *Dark Souls III* so far indicates that PvP will be more balanced. It's more difficult to exploit backstabs than it has been in the past, given that they can be missed if you're not positioned well, leaving you open for a counter while you're locked in an animation. Strength weapons are more viable as well now that you can pivot slightly while in the middle of an attack.





"WHAT WE'VE SEEN OF DSIII SO FAR INDICATES THAT PVP WILL BE BETTER BALANCED"













△○×□ *Dark Souls III* will present us with a crumbling, decaying world that should look incredible thanks to the power of PlayStation 4.

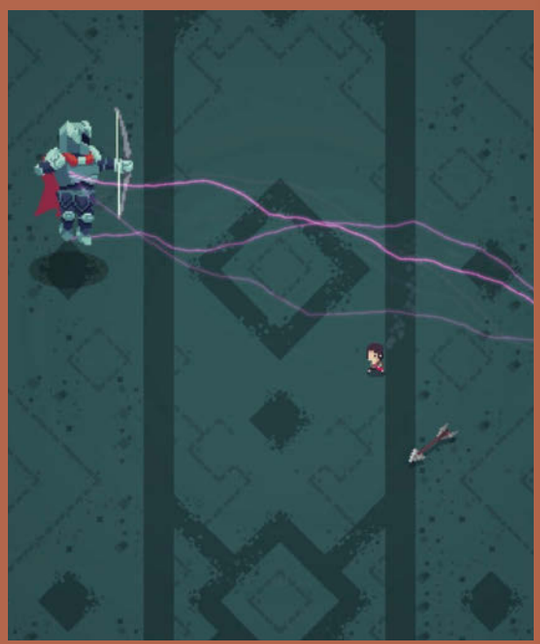
PREPARE TO SURVIVE

A few bits of homework that should give you the best chance to stay alive in Dark Souls III's brutal world



BLOODBORNE

Playing a From Software game is obviously going to be a big help in getting you used to the difficulty and the *Souls* structure that this title shares. *Bloodborne*'s going to be particularly useful, however, because of how much of an influence it has had on *Dark Souls III*'s combat.



TITAN SOULS

In this boss rush, you are dropped in one hit and you only have one arrow to use against the tricky titular Titans, which makes it an ideal way to prepare your nerves. It teaches you to respect your opponents and make your opportunities count, even when under intense pressure.



NIDHOGG

Get ready for PvP by sharpening up on your sword fighting in *Nidhogg*. Sure, the combat system is completely different, but it's good practice when it comes to reading human opponents and learning how to adapt your approach to counter your foe's tactics.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 5

How to best prepare yourself for the crippling trauma that the *Dark Souls* games force you to endure? Play *THPS5*, eat loads of cheese, and then have nightmares about a twitching *Tony Hawk* glitching through the wall of your mind, destroying your happy memories.





17 AMBUSHES ARE COMING

Something that's evident from what we've played of *Dark Souls III* so far is that this is a game that loves its ambushes. We've been taken by surprise in *Souls* games plenty of times in the past, of course, but ambushes seem far more common in the *Dark Souls III* gameplay that From Software has been showing off. This may be changed by the time the final game comes out, but we know that we'll be carefully checking our corners on the assumption that it won't!

18 MANAGE YOUR MOBS

Another similarity that we've noticed between *Bloodborne* and *Dark Souls III* is the need to manage mobs. Getting yourself surrounded by enemies is a sure-fire way to get skewered, chopped, burnt and maimed by the terrifying creatures that roam *Dark Souls III*'s decaying world. That means that drawing enemies out to tackle them on your own terms, rather than wading into the mob like a maniac, is going to be an incredibly important tactic to master.

△○×□ Will *Dark Souls III* still have horrifying enemy design? Here's your answer...

19 BOSSES WILL CHANGE

You know that thing when you're fighting a boss in a *Souls* game and you think that it's going pretty well, and actually you're quite good at this game, and then the boss gets down to half health, transforms, and cuts your ego in half as quickly as it does your character's face? That's probably going to happen a lot. We've already seen it with the Dancer Of The Frigid Valley, who grabs an extra sword halfway through the battle to unleash some terrifying attacks. Miyazaki has indicated that these mutations are something the team is putting a lot of focus on, so steel your nerves...

FROM SOFTWARE BY THE NUMBERS

9

The score *Dark Souls*, *Dark Souls II* and *Bloodborne* all received in Play

48

games released for

5

PlayStation platforms,

34 of which reached Europe

723

The average number of deaths per *Dark Souls* playthrough, according to darksoulsdeaths.com.

SOULS SALES

7,290,000

DEMON'S SOULS	1,810,000
DARK SOULS	3,070,000
DARK SOULS II	2,410,000

www.imagineshop.co.uk



"GETTING YOURSELF SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES IS A SURE-FIRE WAY TO GET SKEWERED, CHOPPED, BURNT AND MAIMED"

20 IT'S GOT SERVERS

Dark Souls III will have its own dedicated servers, which can only be a good thing for online play. Indeed, servers seemed to work well during *Dark Souls III*'s network tests, so hopefully that will carry over when the game releases. During that test, you could only be invaded if you had summoned a phantom for help, but we reckon that will change for the main game.

21 BLOODBORNE IS DONE

If you're hoping for more of what *Bloodborne*'s got to offer, then we're afraid that *Dark Souls III* is your only option. Now that *The Old Hunters* has been released, that means that *Bloodborne* is officially done. It's either a case of moving on to *Dark Souls III* or waiting in the hope that *Bloodborne 2* will eventually be announced!

△○×□ We are getting the impression that this could become a more common sight in *Dark Souls III* thanks to the focus on PvP.

22 MIYAZAKI IS PUMPED

Miyazaki says that with the break he's had away from *Dark Souls* while making *Bloodborne*, he was looking forward to returning to *Souls*. "It has been a long time so I do feel refreshed," he told us. "Sinking into the battle of the hunter and the horror world was not only an exciting experience, but it also allowed me to re-acknowledge the charm of a fantasy world and the intrigue of *Dark Souls*."

23 YOU CAN PRESTIGE

When we say you can prestige, we don't mean that *Dark Souls III* is going all *COD*. What we are talking about is the game's Prestige Edition. This comes with an art book, a map, the soundtrack, and a 40cm Lord Of Cinder figurine, amongst other bits. If you're an obsessive fan with a bit of cash to spare, we're sure you'll love all that *Dark Souls*-themed loot.

24 IS THIS THE END?

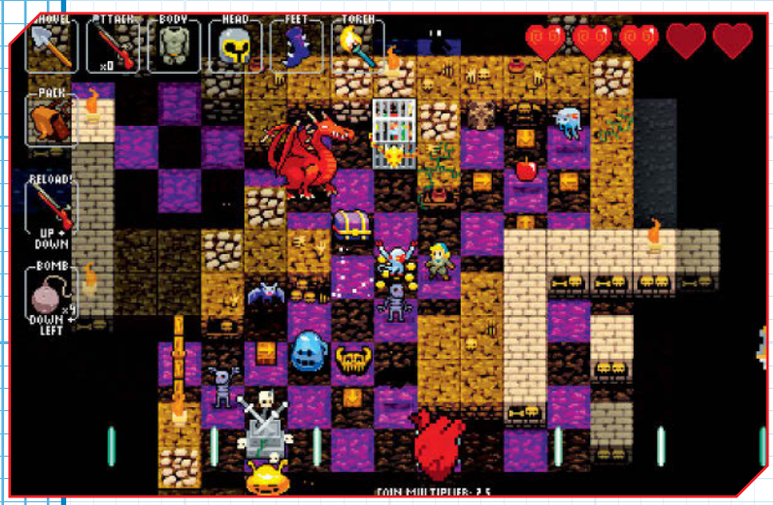
When Miyazaki started talking about *Dark Souls III* as the 'end' of *Dark Souls*, it sounded like this would be the last game in the series. Since clarifying those statements, though, it seems more like he is suggesting that we're going to see a event that represents a *conclusion*. *DSIII* looks to end the cycle of light and dark, so maybe we'll see something different in the *Souls* universe in the future...

25 WE KNOW THE RELEASE DATE

The date on which *Dark Souls III* is unleashed is not too far in the future. You'll be able to grab the game for PlayStation 4 from 12 April. That's unless you're so impatient that you fancy importing the game from Japan on 24 March and trying to deal with *Dark Souls III* in a foreign language? As if it won't be hard enough already...

INDIEVELOPMENT

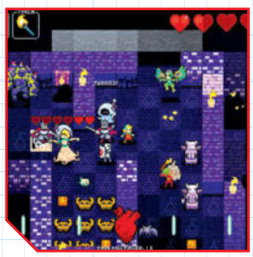
Our indie expert Paul Walker-Emig delves into the exciting, strange and intriguing world of indie development to pick out the best of what's coming to PlayStation





WHEN WE THINK of roguelike dungeon crawlers, we think of monsters, evil wizards and loot. **CRYPT OF THE NECRODANCER** has all that, but it also has a brilliant mechanic that marks it out as unique. When you're exploring *this* dungeon, you've got to do so to a pulsating electronic soundtrack, making every step and swipe of your sword fit to the beat of the music. And what a soundtrack it is from composer Danny Baranowsky, making you nod your head in appreciation as you clobber those skeletons and ghouls in the game's bizarre disco dungeons. It turns out that rhythm-action and dungeon-crawling combat work really well together – you've got to constantly be wary of enemies' attack patterns, planning your movements to avoid getting hit without breaking your combo by falling out of step with the beat of the song that is playing. That need to multitask can make the game pretty intense, but at the same time, there's a possibility of establishing a real sense of flow, as with any great rhythm-action game. We love what we've played of this one and can't wait to see it on Vita and PS4.

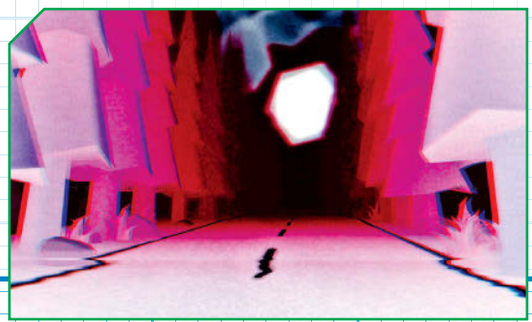
△○×□ **There's a beating heart at the bottom of the screen at all times in *Crypt*, helping you to keep in time with the music.**



A game that we're much less certain about is **SMALL RADIOS BIG TELEVISIONS**. The reason we're uncertain is because it's not entirely clear what it is. Developer Fire Face describes it as "a game about exploring digital worlds stored on analog media", where you "travel through the deserted structures of disused factories, finding tapes of virtual worlds left behind". As vague as that description may be when it comes to the practicalities of playing the game, it does make it sound very intriguing. Indeed, we love the fact that the PS4 gets games like this that are a little... different. So, yes, telling us that the game is about exploration and "the manipulation of audio-visual data" isn't phraseology that you'd describe as hard info on what to expect from *Small Radios Big Televisions*, but it is a description that has grasped our interest because it makes the game sound like something that doesn't fit within established genre parameters. That's something that you rarely get from outside the indie space and something that we think makes the PlayStation library richer.

Of course, indie games aren't all about breaking the boundaries of a certain genre and confusing the hell out of us with weird descriptions. Sometimes they are about taking established conventions, stripping them down to the appeal at their core, and implementing them with style and elegant simplicity. That's





what we're hoping for from **JENNY LECLUE – DETECTIVÚ**, a point-and-click mystery game in which you play as a kid detective trying to clear her mother's name after she is accused of murder. We love the focus on hunting for clues, to the point that you can even hunt for hints by looking around during dialogue scenes to find evidence that might reveal another character as a suspect. Clue hunting is, after all, what makes the mystery genre appealing, so it's cool that *Jenny LeClue* focuses on that, rather that slotting in all sorts of other mechanics that don't need to be there. Having said that, there is another element to this cartoon mystery. The game is presented as a story within a story, with Jenny's tale being authored by a man named Arthur K Finklestein. As well as controlling Jenny, you take control of Arthur to make key decisions about where the story will progress, and it's a story we're looking forward to experiencing for ourselves

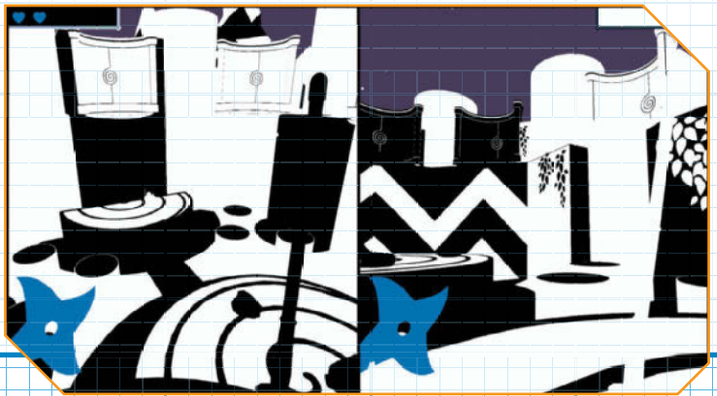




△○×□ **We at Play love detective games, so we're looking forward to seeing more of *Jenny LeClue*.**

"IT TURNS OUT THAT RHYTHM-ACTION AND DUNGEON-CRAWLING COMBAT WORK REALLY WELL TOGETHER"





Our final game also has a certain simplicity to it in that each level is almost entirely drawn with only two colours. This isn't just a stylistic choice, but plays a very important role in the way that **CHAMBARA** plays. Imagine you're playing this multiplayer melee combat game in a level that's only rendered in green and yellow, for example. Your character is entirely green, and your opponent, yellow. This means that you're invisible when you stand in certain places, but horribly exposed in others. *Chambara* thus becomes a nerve-testing game of hide and seek where you try to spot and close the distance on your opponent without giving your own position away, or where you use superior spacial awareness to lure them into ambushes. It's a brilliant idea for a multiplayer game and, if it's implemented well, could prove to be fantastic fun.

FUNDED

PSYCHONAUTS 2

PLATFORMS: PS4
ETA: FALL 2018



Beloved cult classic *Psychonauts* is, like *Shenmue*, a game that people have been asking for a sequel to for ages, but that never seemed like something that would happen. As with *Shenmue III*, though, the impossible has become possible thanks to crowdfunding. For those of you who don't know, *Psychonauts* is an 3D platformer about diving into the psyches of other characters to battle with their mental demons.

WISHLIST

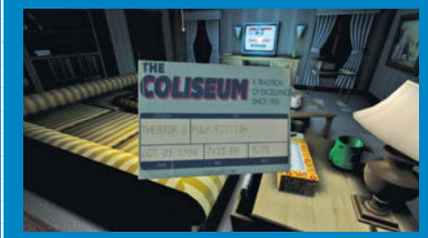
BRIGADOR



This superbly stylish isometric twin-stick shooter would work brilliantly on PS4 or Vita. The game sees you customise your own vehicle (gigantic mech with lots of rockets is probably our preference) and then proceed to blow stuff up in an dark future set in the unstable period after a dictator's death. Once the PC crowd are done testing it for us in early access, we'd welcome the finished and theoretically 'perfect' version on console.

IF YOU LOVE...

STORY GAMES



***Gone Home* is a masterful example of environmental storytelling that plays with genre tropes in an interesting way.**



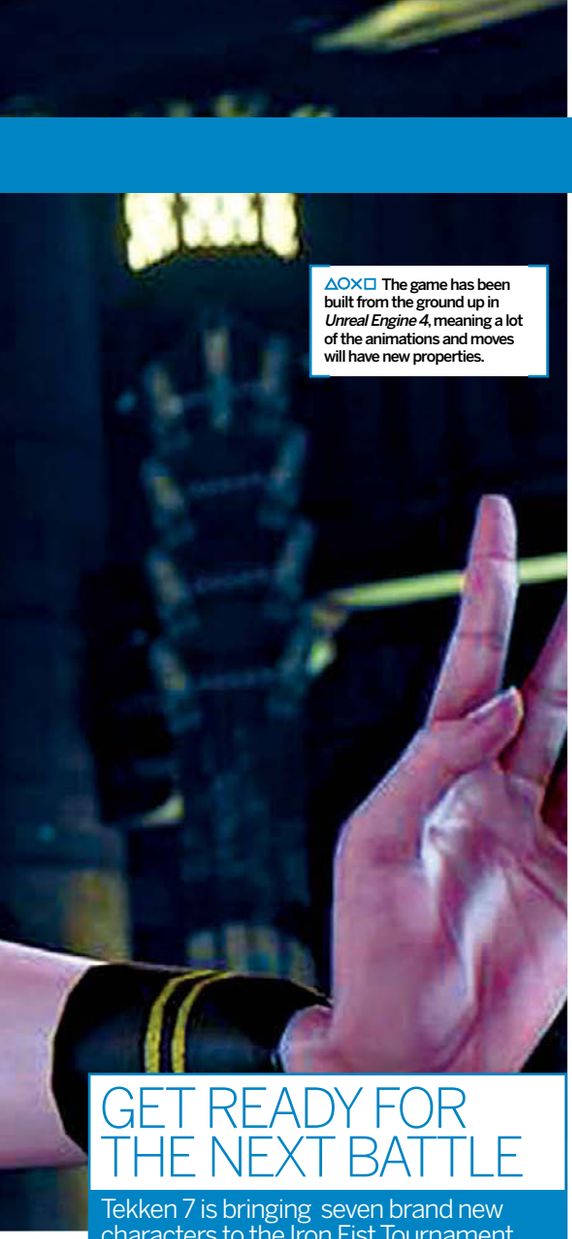
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- There are fighting pandas and evil cyborg soldiers gone wrong.
- *Tekken* is one of the finest 3D fighters out there with a stored heritage.
- Harada has announced that it'll be playable in VR, somehow.
- Speaking of Harada... might the crazy producer finally make himself playable?

△○×□ The backgrounds and arenas have that classic *Tekken* feel and look great in the slightly gloomier new colour palette.

"TEKKEN 7 WANTS TO EXPLORE THE ORIGINS (AND FINALES) OF THE SERIES' MASCOT CHARACTERS"

www.imagineshop.co.uk



△○×□ The game has been built from the ground up in *Unreal Engine 4*, meaning a lot of the animations and moves will have new properties.

ETA 2016 | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @HARADA_TEKKEN

Tekken 7: Fated Retribution

Bryans and tigers and bears, oh my!

PS4

DO YOU PLAY fighting games for their stories? If you said yes, we're judging you. But don't worry – of all the fighting game sagas you'd confess to enjoying, *Tekken* is one of the less obtrusive offenders. In fact, it's actually quite *good*. Not in a particularly creative or groundbreaking way, but it just manages to sort of get away with things we'd find ludicrous in any other story.

There's a bear that runs an international conglomerate – fine. There's a hereditary demonic mutation that seems to skip a generation whenever it damn well pleases – fine. There's a drunken doctor protected by a cyborg ninja – fine. No matter what dumb story beats there are in *Tekken*, it's *fine*, because at the end of the day, all you need to do is beat someone up and it all goes back to normal.

Except this time, it doesn't. *Tekken 7* promises to be the 'final chapter' in the Mishima story – it plans to tie up all the loose ends regarding principal characters Jin, Heihachi and Kazuya. It wants to explore the origins (and finales) of *Tekken*'s most prominent mascots... but that doesn't mean it's the end of the series. Far from it, in fact.

Tekken 7's console release will feature 28 characters – a step down from the 50-plus *Tekken Tag 2* roster, sure, but the seven brand-new characters promise to bring a new flavour to the veteran 3D fighter. Six of these seven newcomers are completely original (see boxout) and offer King Of Iron Fist tournament veterans new challenges to get to grips with. The final one, Gigas, is essentially a reskin of Marduk, only less shouty.

These new characters stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the *Tekken* elite – King, Marshall Law, Yoshimitsu, Bryan Fury, Ling Xiaoyu, Paul Phoenix et al – but ensure the story of *Tekken* will continue past whatever happens with the Mishimas this time around. But we've also got new mechanics to breathe life into *Tekken*'s aging system: Rage Arts and Power Crush. Think of the former as powerful super attacks that are only available when you're on the verge of defeat, when the Rage comeback mechanic kicks in. Power Crushes, though, are more tactical – they're armoured moves that suck up damage and allow you to attack, even if your animation would usually be interrupted. They work well with the new Screw Attack system (which replaces Bound), allowing you to connect additional blows while an enemy is staggered or in the air.

These mechanical changes go hand-in-hand with the new aesthetic *Tekken* is going for – it's all a bit different from the engine *Tekken 6* and *Tag 2* were built on, and opts for speed over power (more like its 2D cousins). But that's no bad thing, especially when you consider the most curious thing *Tekken 7* has added to its roster: a *Street Fighter* character.

It's no surprise, really: *Tekken* veteran Katsuhiro Harada and *Street Fighter* producer and director Yoshinori Ono are close friends, and were supposedly working on a collaboration project for some time. The remains of this mysteriously silent game – *Tekken X Street Fighter* – seem to have surfaced in the form of Akuma's presence in *Tekken 7*: aside from his character model looking *totally* at odds with *Tekken*'s style, his presence in the game seems to unify all these mysterious origin stories, and gives us a taste of what we can expect from the crossover, assuming it's still happening.

Other than that, returning characters have all had their move sets reviewed and altered to fit in with the new mechanics, and the stages have all gone a bit apocalyptic. Harada has confirmed that the game is going to be taking a lot of its inspiration from *Tekken 4*... which is widely regarded as the worst in the main series. We only hope he means that in reference to *Tekken 4*'s darker tone – core fighting needs very little improvement over *Tekken Tag 2*, really.

Perhaps most interesting, though, is the recent announcement that *Tekken 7* will be coming to PlayStation VR. The extent of the implementation is currently unknown but whether it's the whole game that works in VR or just some of the series' daft mini-games, it can't hurt to have another huge franchise on board for when PS VR lands later this year...

Dom Peppiatt

TEKKEN 7 is being developed in the top-secret Mishima department of Bandai Namco. Check the website for more details: **tekken-official.jp**

GET READY FOR THE NEXT BATTLE

Tekken 7 is bringing seven brand new characters to the Iron Fist Tournament



JOSIE RIZAL
The namesake of a Filipino cultural hero, Josie practices kickboxing and Eskrima.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Beginner



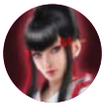
GIGAS
Quite Marduk-like, this cybernetic humanoid uses power drives and command throws.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Intermediate



SHAHEEN
Shaheen uses mixed military self-defense techniques and *loves* cheeky command grabs.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Beginner



LUCKY CHLOE
Chloe uses skills learned on *DDR* games in battle, and dresses like a kitten.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Intermediate



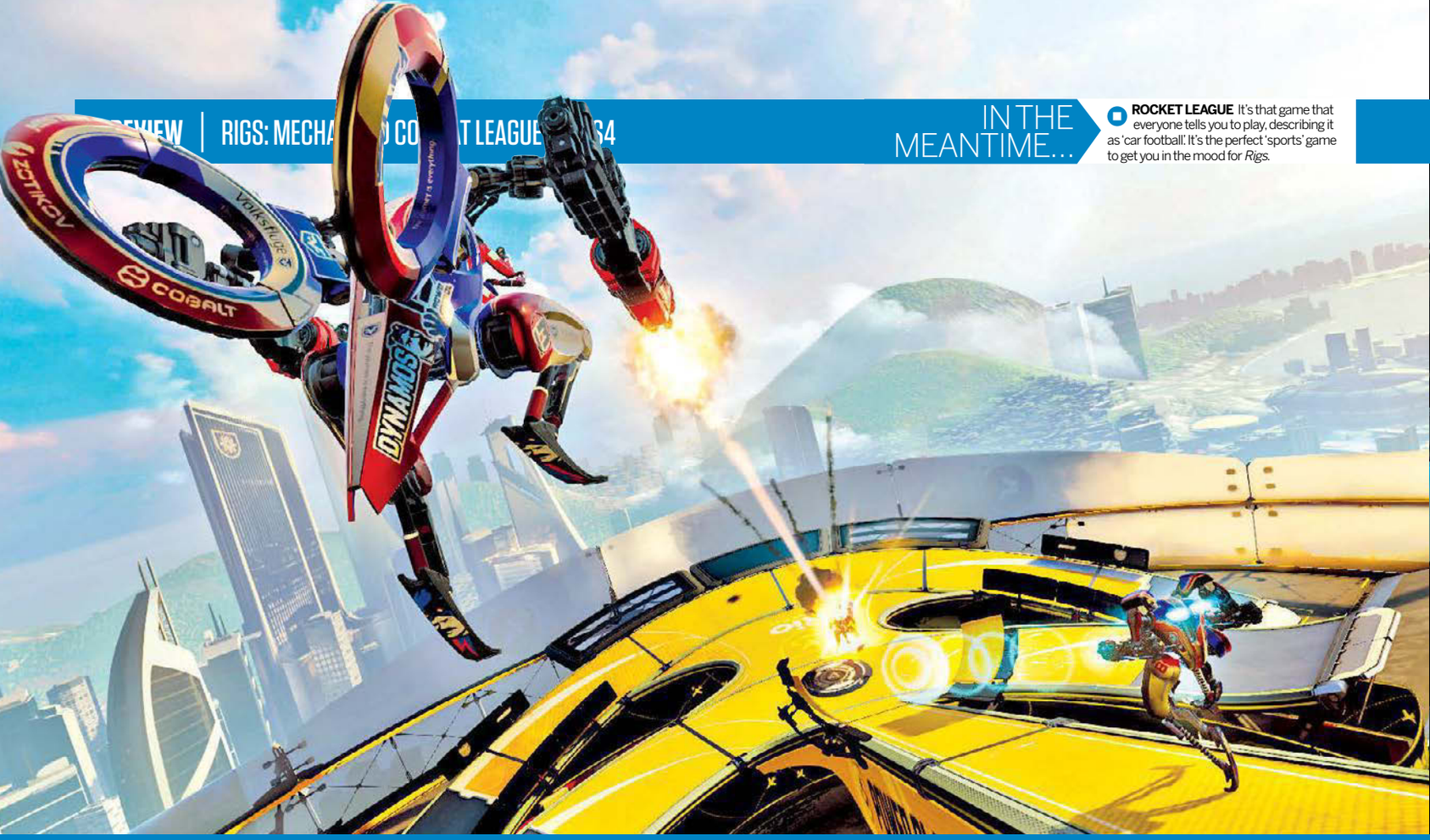
KAZUMI MISHIMA
Heihachi's enigmatic wife, she seems to have an affiliation with the Devil Gene.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Expert



CLAUDIO SERAFINO
Italian member of the 'Anti-Devil' organisation, Claudio uses magic and charge moves.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Expert



KATARINA ALVES
Katarina uses short, sharp attacks thought up in the Savate discipline.
RECOMMENDED LEVEL: Expert



ETA Q2 2016 | **PUB** SONY | **DEV** GUERRILLA CAMBRIDGE | **TWITTER** @GUERRILLA

Rigs: Mechanized Combat League

Prediction: this won't be a real sport in 50 years

PS4

SET IN THE year 2065, *Rigs* is one of those simple setups you don't see much of from the big-name games: it's the not-so-distant future, it's a sport and you are playing the sport. With that comes your giant robosuits and the rules of a new game to understand: ones which are simple enough to grasp quickly (score more goals than your opponent) and suitably different from real world sports (smash up your opponents). Nothing surprising so far.

Where the interesting element comes in is through *Rigs*' big, back-of-the-box attraction: it's a flagship game for PlayStation VR; it's the sort of title Sony is hoping will convince you to invest in a headset. With such responsibility weighing on its shoulders, will Guerrilla Cambridge's foray into future sports be up to spec? Right now, we're yet to be convinced – but the potential is definitely there.

Rigs is your classic sports game (put thing in goal to win). What's different here, though, is there's no ball to dunk – your big robo-stomper is the ball. You have to jump yourself through the arena's central scoring ring when the time is right in order to get points on the board – and you have to stop the opposition from doing the same.

This is where *Rigs*' different roles come into play: some of the mechs are quick and sprinty, the sort you'll want to be trying to speedily navigate into scoring positions; some are slow and powerful, the kind you'll see setting up a no-score perimeter to take out anyone cheeky enough to try and bag some points; some play as stalker/hunters, preying on those in the arena too engrossed elsewhere to pay attention to their six… and so on. It's another simple, but potentially effective, element to the game.

This tactical play – augmented by each robo's ability to use three different modes (repair, speed and attack) – is something most of us will be familiar with. It's the VR element that turns *Rigs* from a future-sports game with potential into something that could be revelatory. Rather than just playing the sport, you're *there*. Strategy and tactics become something you get drawn in to, massively, while scoring a bot-goal becomes a full body experience. Then again, it could just make you feel sick.

The main issues we can see coming from *Rigs* are twofold. First, from what we've seen and heard it doesn't come across like there's a great deal to the game. This could go either way, frankly, as simplicity in and of itself isn't automatically a good *or* bad thing. Where certain online shooters, say, suffer from a lack of things to do beyond a handful of concepts, other multiplayer games thrive in a world where their simplicity adds to the appeal.

Second is the reticence that comes from hearing about a title from Guerrilla, even if it is from a satellite UK-based wing of the studio. The *Killzone* series has been an up-and-down affair over the years – the pattern always goes as follows: a game is revealed, it looks great and sounds cool, we get excited, when it comes out we're either happy with it (rarely) or bored out of our minds with it (less rarely). Of course, this isn't a write-off of *Rigs* before it's out – we're nice like that – but it is a fair point to highlight.

The only way we're going to figure out if *Rigs* is the former or latter is by getting our hands – and heads – stuck in. Removed from the VR shroud, we would hope it stands up on its own two robolegs, and when fully immersed in PlayStation VR we want to see a game that really makes virtual reality *essential*.

Ian Dransfield

RIGS: MECHANIZED COMBAT LEAGUE is refining its bot-goal scoring technique at Guerilla Cambridge. Check out **guerrilla-games.com** for more details.

IN THE MEANTIME…

ROCKET LEAGUE It's that game that everyone tells you to play, describing it as 'car football.' It's the perfect 'sports' game to get you in the mood for *Rigs*.

△○×□ This is probably the robotic version of Manchester City, though we can't be sure on that one.

WHEN FULLY IMMERSED IN PLAYSTATION VR, WE WANT TO SEE A GAME THAT REALLY MAKES VIRTUAL REALITY ESSENTIAL

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

△ It's a showcase of PlayStation VR's ability to give us a great game.

□ *Rocket League* proved mechanised sports in game form can be great.

× Geared towards teams, it's the kind of thing that could be a multiplayer mainstay.

○ Giant robots smashing into things, including giant robots! What more do you need?

△○×□ Fears that PlayStation VR games would take a visual hit would appear to be unfounded, at least from what we've seen here.

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MISSSSSSS!

Wait, no: "Goal!"

It's an obvious one, but we're all going to be sharing our goals in *Rigs*. Even standard,'vanilla' sports games get shared everywhere all the time when something fun or cool happens. Add giant robots and explosions into the mix and you'll have an even more cluttered Twitter feed – but one riddled with explosive goals and metal-on-metal tackles. Bliss.

IN THE MEANTIME...

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER
Learning to play well with others is critical in *Ghost Recon*. Treat *Future Soldier* as a boot camp and you'll be well prepped for *Wildlands*.



ETA TBA | **PUB** UBISOFT | **DEV** UBISOFT PARIS | **TWITTER** @GHOSTRECON

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands

The upside of the War On Drugs

PS4

UBISOFT PROBABLY WON'T thank us for saying it, but there's something more than a little bit *Top Gear* about everything we've seen of *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands*. "Tonight! Hammond falls out of an aeroplane. James gets blown up in a Jeep. And I go to South America to shoot a drug lord with a *gun*." If all the idiots who signed that viral 'Clarkson for Prime Minister' petition that did the rounds years ago had gotten their way, this really would be how the War On Drugs was fought (before the build-up of petrol fumes melted the Earth like a toffee apple).

In this newest entry to the Clancy-verse, you and three of your most grizzly mates are jetting off to Bolivia, which is now the cocaine capital of the world. Once Clarkson Squad touches down, bristling with expertly customised weaponry and beards, you're free to roam the icy mountaintops on foot, buzz around the deserts on dirt bikes or swoop over the lush jungle canopies in helicopters. Oh, and shoot people.

Said people are – Russians perhaps being a bit impolitic at the moment – the sinister Santa Blanca drug cartel, an enemy that "does not fear death". Which is handy, as there's plenty of that going around in this, the series' first open-world Clance-em-up. Creative tango-whacking is the name of the game: if your target's a drug kingpin, you might drive into his compound guns blazing, creep around the perimeter at night giving his goons the ol' videogame death-hug, or nick a military helicopter and plough it in through the skylight. Imagine asking Donald Trump to write a foreign policy agenda after a binge of *Just Cause 3*. It's like that, assuming he knows what foreign policy *is*.

It all looks and sounds wonderful – particularly the Bolivian landscape, with its varied topography, day-night cycle, and hapless, terrified villagers. But what's been shown of *Wildlands* so far does make it look, just a little bit, like one of *those* Ubisoft games. You know the ones we mean: lots of big open space, outposts to attack, vehicles to pilfer, all linked tenuously together with some slightly nebulous end goal (escape the island, avenge your family, free Kyrat) and perhaps – and this is only a *perhaps*, mind – not a whole lot in between.

There's also the game's trumpeting of four-player co-op to consider. After climbing up things and flicking switches to unveil shrouded map segments, this is quickly becoming Ubisoft's next gameplay fetish – both *The Division* and *Rainbow Six Siege* were marketed as team sports, for better or worse. *Wildlands* will have a system by which players can hop in and hop out to be replaced by AI partners, but we're anxious to see just how much the game is being developed with lone wolves in mind, rather than as co-op shooter first with support for solo players tacked on.

From what Ubisoft describes, the system of AI squad control will work as it has done in past games in the series: move your burly, uniformed gravel-bots about, line up targets for them, then drop the villains like an Olympic synchronised swim team taking revenge on an overly touchy coach. But *Wildlands*, with its open world-y-ness,

www.imagineshop.co.uk





△○×□ *Wildlands* will reportedly have nine different terrain types for you to wade through, scramble over and freeze to death in.



SHARE THIS

COUP D'ETAT

How to smash a narco state

We're not sure if we mentioned it, but there's a lot of shooting in *Wildlands*. But, intriguingly, perforating your targets looks like it'll only be one way of completing your objectives. Your overarching mission in *Wildlands* is to destabilise the cartel and make its members turn on each other – by robbing a drug lord of his coke and then leaving him to his bosses, for example. Expect some creative, underhanded problem-solving videos to surface after *Wildlands*' launch.



WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- △ The cartel will chase you all across Bolivia, like the best/worst gap year ever.
- □ How you tackle the cartel is up to you. Do you go in loud? Quietly? With a boom?
- × *Wildlands*' virtual garage contains everything from helicopters to dirt bikes to, er, dinghies.
- ○ Gunsmith returns in *Wildlands*, letting you drool over parts like aging men at car shows.

is a different animal to *Ghost Recon* games of yore. Ordering three AIs around relatively pokey environments in, say, *Future Soldier* was already a challenge – and a rewarding one at that. But pushing them round a whole country could make us feel like one of those supply teachers you see herding children round the British Museum between desperate drags on an e-cigarette.

That said, what Ubisoft has shown looks beautiful (in a sort of blood-spattery way), and as the outpost missions in *Far Cry* are one of its grimly creative highlights, doing the same sort of thing with a *Ghost Recon* squad-based twist could be a natural jump forward. Our only hope is that in shaking up the formula, Ubisoft Paris hasn't sprayed all the tighter, more narrative-driven bits of the series all over the kitchen.

Rich Wordsworth



△○×□ If that cage on the right doesn't have a tiger in it that we can set loose, we're going to be writing some angry tweets.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON WILDLANDS is growing its beard at Ubisoft Paris. For more intel, visit: **ghost-recon.ubi.com/wildlands/en-gb/home/**

IN THE MEANTIME...

SUPER MEAT BOY Playing a platformer where you're going to die a lot seems like good preparation for, well, a platformer where you're going to die a lot.

ETA 2016 | **PUB** ADULT SWIM GAMES | **DEV** VIDEOCULT | **TWITTER** @RAINWORLDGAME

Rain World

Soaked in style

PS4

OUR CONNECTION WITH a protagonist is often built on what they say and how we see them interact with others. Sometimes, though, there are heroes that are designed with such craft and that exude so much character in the way that they move, that they can wheedle their way into our hearts without saying a word. Such is the case with *Rain World*'s adorable slugcat.

Just because we are playing as a cute feline/slug hybrid, however, that doesn't mean that the world we're going to inhabit is all soft and fluffy. On the contrary, *Rain World* is a brutal survival platformer where you have to negotiate abandoned industrial wastelands between bursts of lethal rainfall, searching for food whilst trying to ensure you don't become dinner for the terrifying creatures that also roam this beautifully bleak dystopic landscape.

Taking a peek at these screenshots of the game will tell you that it looks incredibly stylish, but is important to emphasise that it *really* comes to life in motion. That's a result of the fact that developer Videocult has used some kind of physics-based jiggery-pokery in coding its animation to give it a real sense of life. We don't understand the complicated tech behind it, but as we watch slugcat clamber swiftly around the world, shimmying up poles, grabbing food, or running from the nightmarish creatures hunting it down, we can see that it has imbued *Rain World* with a fluidity and personality that makes it really special.

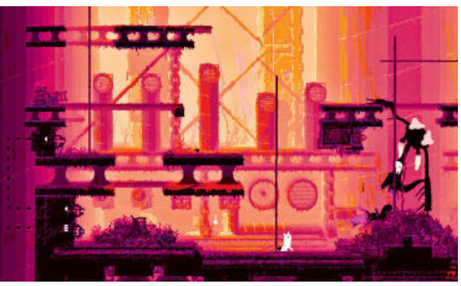
Rain World's awesome animation is a big part of what makes its enemies so terrifying as well. Lizard-like creatures, gigantic bugs, horrible spiders, and Lovecraftian tentacled things all move in creepily distinctive ways. Perhaps more interesting, though, is the fact that each of them has unique AI that causes them to behave differently in the way that they chase you down (and we're not just talking about the different species – we're talking about individual creatures). That's going to make those scavenging runs even tougher as you're forced to learn how to deal with every threat you encounter on the fly.

Speaking of that threat, the game world is in constant evolution, becoming more dangerous as time goes on. The instinct when you come across enemies is to run from them, but the creatures that survive will breed, spawning new, more dangerous beasts that want to make you their prey. That means that while running will still often be the sensible approach, you will want to get slugcat's spears out and try to impale your hunters. Just make sure you don't get close, or it's game over.

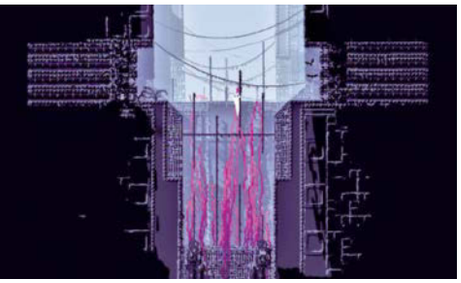


"ANIMATION IMBUES RAIN WORLD WITH A FLUIDITY AND PERSONALITY THAT MAKES IT REALLY SPECIAL"

www.imagineshop.co.uk









△○×□ Damn, that was a close call...

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- △ It has managed to make a creature called a 'slugcat' adorable.
- □ The game's animation is on another level, really bringing its brilliant pixel art to life.
- × You can throw objects to slow down or kill the creatures that want to eat you.
- ○ The world evolves, with creatures breeding to create dangerous enemies.



△○×□ Surviving alongside a friend in co-op could be a way to make *Rain World* a little less punishing.

THE DNA OF RAIN WORLD

DON'T STARVE

Both Klei's *Don't Starve* and *Rain World* are about surviving in a hostile world full of grotesque enemies where the odds are stacked against you.



DARK SOULS

This is a game where you've got to get used to dying a lot and learn from each and every death. *Rain World* also has some of that punishing difficulty.



SKULLGIRLS

It has a completely different art style to *Rain World*, but it's an example of the kind of skilled 2D animation that you will see in the game.



We don't yet know much about what the single-player game will entail – other than surviving – but Videocult has given us the impression that there will be things to discover that will change how the game plays. Whether that means they are hinting towards a story that builds on significant events, we're not sure, but gifs the developer have shared earlier in the game's development that showed the main character shepherding baby slugcats to safety could be a clue that there is a tale to be told.

In any case, we're sure single-player is going to be the main attraction, but it is cool to hear that there will be multiplayer support too. That includes co-op play and four-player competitive modes – deathmatch, a wave-based mode, and more.

With some really interesting ideas centered on enemy behaviour and evolution, stellar art design, and its impressive animation system, this is a game that's really got our attention. We're tempted to forecast a very bright future...

Paul Walker-Emig

RAIN WORLD is currently slithering around at Videocult. Swing on over to the website for more details: **joarportfolio.com/rainworld.html**

ANATOMY OF... EVAN

The Boy King is getting overthrown and it's up to us to restore him to the throne in the sequel to the astoundingly beautiful Ni No Kuni when it hits PS4...

DING DONG WHAT?

When it comes to titles, 'The Boy King Of Ding Dong Dell' is not very impressive, but that's what Evan is, and he's still a King, damn it. Unlike the previous hero, Oliver, Evan appears to be a resident born in the land of Ni No Kuni. Along with this brand-new protagonist, it appears that *Ni No Kuni II* will introduce us to a whole new cast of characters, rather than returning to old ones.

IT'S A COUP!

When Ding Dong Dell is attacked in a coup, Evan's mother proceeds to kick some ass. Unfortunately, tragedy strikes and Evan's mother is killed during the battle. It then seems that, supported by Roland, a stranger transported into the Other World like Oliver in the first game, Evan embarks on an epic quest to gain the support he needs to retake the Kingdom from the evil force that has taken over.

GHIBLI STYLE

One thing that the first *Ni No Kuni* was praised for was how incredible it looks, courtesy of the fact that developer Level-5 worked with Studio Ghibli – the film studio behind *Spirited Away* – on the game's visuals. We don't yet know if Ghibli is still involved, but what we've seen of Evan and the world of Ding Dong Dell is consistent with the style of the first game. In other words, Ghibli or not, it looks absolutely stunning!

FEELING FAMILIAR?

Assuming Level-5 hasn't completely overhauled the battle system, you will be able to fight as Evan in the game. However, you can also collect Familiars that take your place, levelling up and evolving them to become more powerful. Fights are conducted in real time, but you can freeze them to select specific actions and give your characters roles to perform.

ETA 2016 | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO | **DEV** LEVEL-5 | **TWITTER** @BANDAINAMCOUK

Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom PS4

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IN THE MEANTIME...

FAR CRY 3 You know that *Far Cry Primal* is going to have a lot in common with its predecessors, so the best in the *Far Cry* series is an ideal way to prepare.



ETA 23 FEBRUARY 2016 | **PUB** UBISOFT | **DEV** UBISOFT MONTREAL | **TWITTER** @FARCRYGAME

Far Cry Primal

The definition of insanity?

PS4

WE DON'T THINK that we're going to get what we initially wanted from *Far Cry Primal*, but we *are* going to be getting something completely different that might just make up for it.

When *Primal* was initially revealed, we spoke about how we'd like to see the game shake up the *Far Cry* formula a bit by putting more focus on hunting. The prehistoric setting of the game seemed like an ideal excuse to change hunting so that it isn't just about grabbing a few skins to upgrade your gear, but something that you need to do in order to survive. What we've seen of the game since doesn't give us confidence that the game is going to drift in the survival simulation direction we had hoped. It does, however, introduce us to something that could be just as interesting.

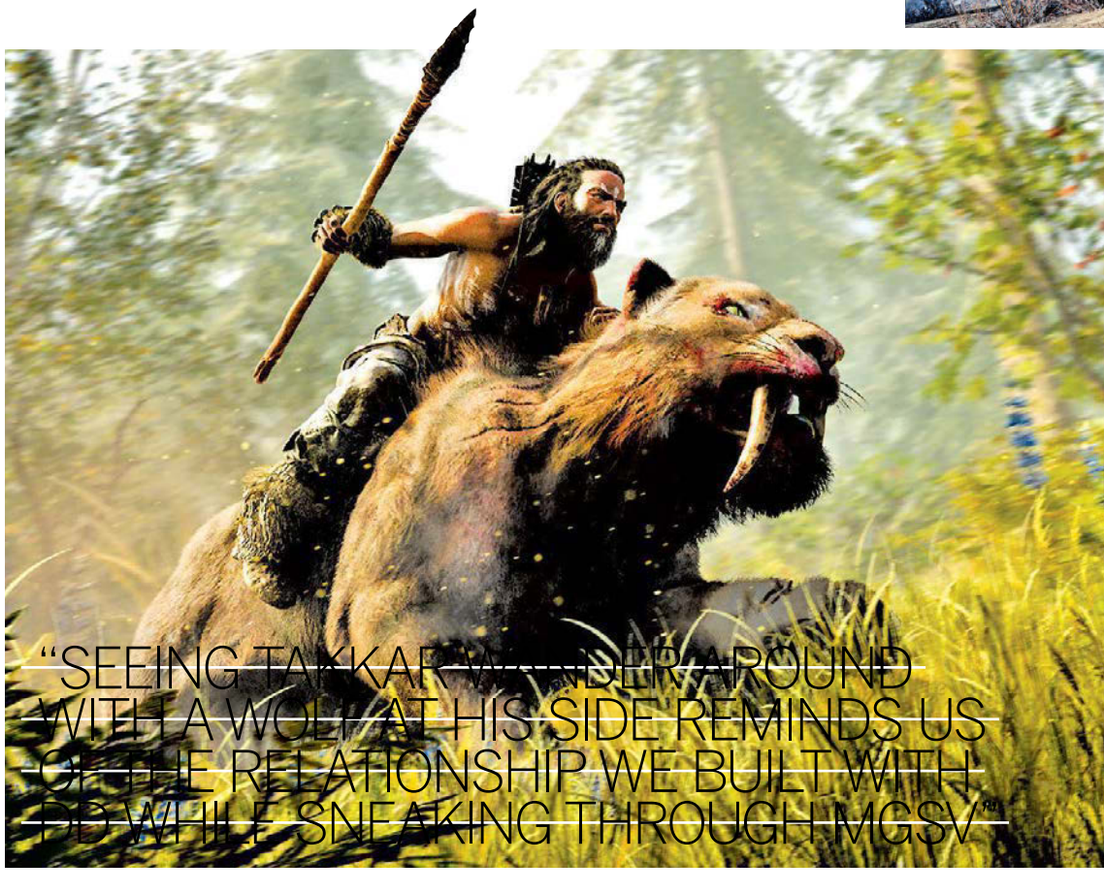
The character you play as – Takkar – is a 'beast master', which means he can tame any creature in the world. Wolves; sabre-toothed tigers; prehistoric badgers – they can all be put under your spell and used to wreak havoc on enemy outposts in a way that we never seen in a *Far Cry* game before.

One of Takkar's key woodland friends is the owl. You can call this creature in to get a bird's-eye view of an outpost and it *can* drop bombs from this vantage point (best not to bother question the realism of an owl undertaking bombing runs at this point). Its primary use, however, seems to be as a recon tool to tag enemies, meaning it is effectively a replacement for the binoculars we've been using in past *Far Cry* games.

From there, you can call in a bear – or whatever other creature you fancy – and have it accompany you into battle, ordering it to take down specific enemies, or let it go about its business clawing your foes to shreds.

Those moments when a dangerous predator would naturally emerge from the jungle and stampede through an outpost in *Far Cry 3*, or when you would deliberately free a caged mountain lion to distract guards in *Far Cry 4*, represent one of the coolest elements of *Far Cry* games, so giving us the ability to play around with what different animals are able to do in this game makes a lot of sense. Those crazy scenarios that *Far Cry*'s wildlife can create will still happen; *Primal*'s subjugation of the animal kingdom to Takkar just means that we'll be able to create them ourselves, too.

Seeing Takkar wander around with a wolf at his side reminds us at times of the relationship we built with DD while sneaking through *MGSV* as our canine companion warned us of the dangers we couldn't yet see. Wolves have a similar ability in this game, and there will be other creatures that will bring their own skills to the table, too. Given that these animals can die while accompanying you (they can be healed them by feeding them meat), we wonder whether *Primal* might be able to create an emotional connection with our animal companions that could lead to us pining for fallen friends that we've spent hours roaming the wilds



"SEEING TAKKAR WANDER AROUND WITH A WOLF AT HIS SIDE REMINDS US OF THE RELATIONSHIP WE BUILT WITH DD WHILE SNEAKING THROUGH MGSV"

A LINK TO THE DISTANT PAST

Far Cry Primal isn't the only game in 2016 taking us back to the Stone Age



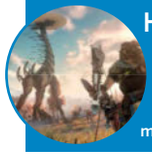
WILD

The next game from the man behind *Rayman* (Michel Ancel) has a lot in common with *Primal*. Not only does it have a tribal setting, but you can possess animals in order to use their abilities to your advantage.



ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED

This game has something that its prehistoric stablemates don't. We're not talking about the fact that it's an MMO/survival-a-thon. We're talking about the fact that it has dinosaurs... actual dinosaurs! We're already on board.



HORIZON ZERO DAWN

Okay, so this game isn't *technically* set in the distant past, but it has world that is populated with robot dinosaurs and the fact that you're in a tribe using prehistoric-style weapons means it may as well be.





△○×□ Chuck a bit of meat at a wolf, tell it to calm down, and apparently that's enough to tame it. Who knew?





WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

△ There are no guns this time, forcing us to mix things up with bows and spears.

□ You can become a leader, responsible for managing your tribe members.

× There are no radio towers to climb (they were fine for a while, but we've had enough now)!

○ You can ride woolly mammoths. Does anything else really need to be said?

with. That would be cool, but there's also the danger that they'll just feel like disposable tools that you can replace. We'll have to see.

In any case, we're pleased to see these new animal control mechanics in the game, because the series is in danger of getting stale. Don't get us wrong, we've enjoyed the *Far Cry* games, but you can't deny that they're formulaic, and any time something follows a formula, you know that it's going to get tiresome. The fact that the first thing we did when *Primal* was announced was to start looking for ways in which it will be different to the previous games is an indication that we're edging towards that point. Now that we know we can tame a badger to fight with us, we've got reason to hope that *Far Cry* fatigue has been delayed.

Paul Walker-Emig

FAR CRY PRIMAL is being dragged out of the primordial soup at Ubisoft Montreal. Check the website to hunt down more details: **far-cry.ubisoft.com/primal**



△○×□ The bow is deadly, sure, but we're willing to bet that giant tiger in the background is more dangerous...



"TO SUCCEED AT DIRT, YOU NEED TO BE EITHER A VETERAN RACING GAME FAN OR A VERY FAST LEARNER"

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- A detailed simulation, this is the closest *Dirt* has come to total authenticity.
- No rewind button means a steep difficulty curve. Defeat is brutal but victory feels sweet.
- A sizeable roster of cars including classics such as the Mini Cooper and Toyota Corolla.
- Fantastic sound design. Engines, crashes and the cool voice of your co-driver are all spot on.

△○×□ Races take place around the world, with Germany, Finland and the UK providing varied backdrops and challenging new weather conditions.



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ETA 5 APRIL 2016 | **PUB** CODEMASTERS | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @DIRTGAME

Dirt Rally

Rewinding to a time before rewinds

PS4

YOU PULL UP to the starting line and your co-driver starts to count you in. "Five, four, three...". His calm, middle-English tones seem at odds with what lies ahead, miles of rough, banking Greek countryside, a labyrinth of hairpin rights and acute lefts – you feel totally unprepared. And then you're off. With a deliberate but still calmly uttered, "Go," your passenger signals your modified Volkswagen out onto the track, immediately spilling into a litany of technical but vital instructions. "Left three, long, 60. Right six, continue to 100. Keep left over crest. Into left five, don't cut. Caution right six, small jump, into left six long." It's hard to keep up with the jargon, even harder when you're wrestling a turbo-charged dirt car down the side of a mountain. But that cool meditative voice, constantly in your ear, making every skid, bump and sudden gear change seem like it's being read from sheet music, is what makes *Dirt Rally*. This feels like the most sophisticated simulation, at least in its strand of rally games, that Codemasters has ever created. Engines roar and metal crunches, ice and mud coat the flanks or your trusty motor, and every corner feels nail-bitingly precarious. To succeed at *Dirt*, you need to be either a veteran fan, the kind that's been with Codemasters since the *Colin McRae* days, or a very fast learner.

And that could be the game's undoing. At least for some people, the prospect of losing minutes, maybe even half an hour of precious progress because of just one botched corner will feel daunting and unfair. Gone is the rewind button – if you make a mistake in *Dirt Rally*, there's no Tippexing it out and carrying on from your last safe place. This is a racing game by way of *Dark Souls*. The rugged tracks and high speeds demand skill and concentration, and every error, no matter how slight, is swiftly punished.

Dirt Rally is the driving game as it used to be. The practically vertical difficulty might dissuade some rookies, but folk put off by the recent crop of racers, who consider rewinds, checkpoints and adjustable difficulty below them, will feel likewise at home here. Anyone who recalls the original *Gran Turismo*, and fluffing the last corner of a 75-lap endurance race, only to be met with the cold indifference of a fourth place trophy and the option to start the whole thing again, will have an appreciation for *Dirt*. In fact, it might be a game for masochists, period – strip away the motor-racing facade and *Dirt* starts to feel like an intensely challenging platformer, the kind of twitch-centric wits and reflex test that people love to brag about finishing. It loves its cars, and the propensity for detail is impressive, but *Dirt*, currently, has appeal beyond a pure racing sim.

And it's fun. Really, really, fun. The voice of your co-driver might anchor you to a matter-of-fact style of driving, but ultimately *Dirt* is about tearing around the countryside at 150mph. Track racing is fine and *Dirt* even gives the option to compete on tarmac, but spraying a cloud of dust over a waiting press pack as you roar down the slopes of Pikes Peak is a joy pretty much unrivalled. You only have to play *Ride*, *DriveClub* or *Forza* to see that racers have started to get dry. *Dirt* has the depth of a credible simulation, but, as it stands, there's enough vim, brio and colour in here to set it apart from its contemporaries. The list of vehicles and tracks (17 cars, 36 courses) is long enough to keep things varied without breaching spreadsheet levels of micro-management and customisation. Racing is tough and the stakes are high, but *Dirt* has enough flair and energy to keep things light. So far, *Dirt Rally* seems to straddle the best of all driving games, encompassing the fun of something like *Burnout* with the simulation of a game like *Grid*. When it launches in April, it could prove to be Codemasters' biggest PS4 hit to date.

Ed Smith

DIRT RALLY is being briefed by its co-driver over at Codemasters, using the *Ego 3.0* engine that powered *F1 2014* and *Grid Autosport*. More info here: **dirtgame.com**



CRASH! BANG! WALLOP!

"...what a video!"

This being rally, there are plenty of opportunities for major screw-ups and big crashes, and thanks to *Dirt*'s excellent physics system, they're all captured in excruciating minutiae. Sharing the moment your beloved Ford Focus barrel-rolled down the slopes of Pikes Peak, and recalling how many precious minutes of perfect driving that accident set you back, is always going to be a painful (yet spectacular) experience.

PRIOR FORM

EA SPORTS UFC A steady flow of patches has led to *UFC* being a better game now than it was at release. Hopefully, this entry won't need so many updates to get to that level!

"LET'S JUST HOPE OUR EXPECTATIONS DON'T GET KNOCKED DOWN AS QUICKLY AS JOSÉ ALDO"





ETA 17 MARCH | **PUB** EA | **DEV** EA CANADA | **TWITTER** @EASPORTSUFC

EA Sports UFC 2

"It's time!"

PS4

THERE'S ONE THING that's become clear now that we've had our first look at *EA Sports UFC 2*'s gameplay, and that is that the game will look *incredible*. That's not much of a surprise given that the series' first entry was already very impressive from a visual standpoint, but the detail and realism with which EA Canada has recreated UFC's most famous fighters is nonetheless impressive.

What's not yet clear is whether it is going to deliver the improvements that are required to take a good first effort to the next level with this sequel. The most obvious area in need of improvement is the game's grappling and submission systems. EA Canada is making the right noises, talking about giving us "freedom of independent fighter control in every grappling situation", suggesting that there's a greater variety and more natural feel to those moments where you are wrestling for position. We hope that proves to be the case when we get out hands on it.

A number of new mechanics offer up some potential for new strategies. Most notably, you can now try to surprise your opponents with submissions from the clinch and can quickly transition from one submission hold to another. EA also promises improved blocking and parrying systems, and greater control over your fighters head movements. Again, we like what we're hearing but we really need to go hands-on with the game to see if *UFC 2* can back up all this talk. After all, any competitor can brag before a fight, but when they get in the Octagon, some of them end up flat on their backs within seconds.

We enjoyed the first EA *UFC* game enough to feel positive about the potential of this sequel and the awareness EA has shown about the weaknesses that need to be addressed only serves to feed that optimism. Let's just hope our expectations don't get knocked down as quickly as Jose Aldo in his much-hyped title fight with cover star Conor McGregor...

Paul Walker-Emig

EA SPORTS UFC 2 is in the training camp over at EA Canada. Check the website for more details: **easports.com/uk/ufc**



△○×□ As you might have guessed, EA announced Ronda Rousey as one of the cover stars of *UFC 2* before she got pummelled. Never mind, eh?

PRIOR FORM

DON'T STARVE We gave Klei Entertainment's *Don't Starve* 8/10 when we reviewed it back in issue 240. We did so because it is really bloody good.



ETA 2016 | **PUB** KLEI ENTERTAINMENT | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @KLEI

Invisible, Inc.

XCOM give it to ya

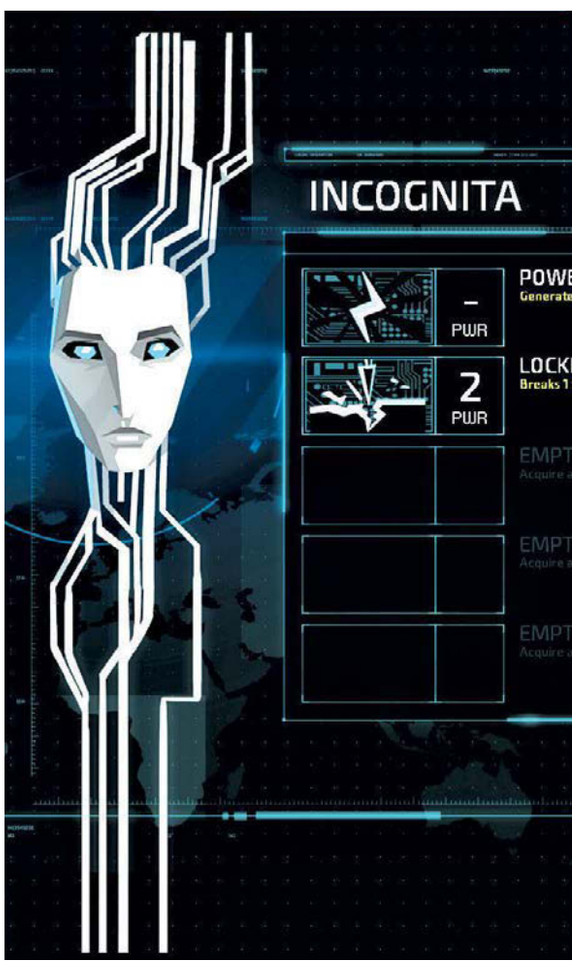
PS4

LOOK AT DEVELOPER Klei's recent record and it quickly becomes apparent that *Invisible, Inc.* is a game that deserves your attention. This is the studio that made one of the best survival games of recent years in *Don't Starve* and, prior to that, made one of the best stealth games of recent years in the form of *Mark Of The Ninja*. Now that it has turned its skilled hand to bringing turn-based stealth strategy to the PS4 with its latest game, we're taking notice.

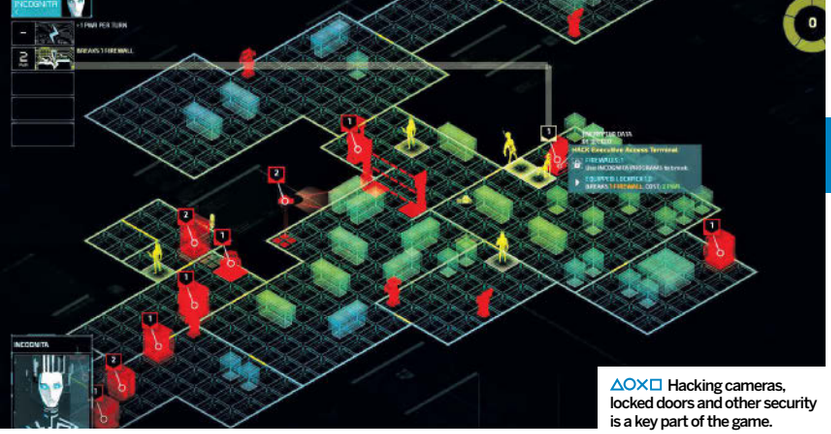
"IT IS FAR FROM A WALK IN THE PARK, REQUIRING A STRATEGIC MIND THAT CAN THINK A FEW MOVES AHEAD"

This tale of espionage is set in a future controlled by megacorporations. You take control of the agents of a private intelligence agency who must infiltrate the corporations that are trying to take them down. All that talk of espionage and infiltration means you probably won't be surprised when we tell you that while you can engage in combat in the game, the focus is primarily on stealth. Using the abilities of *Invisible, Inc.*'s different characters (you can take two on a mission), you'll want to focus on hacking enemy tech and obscuring your position to avoid as much conflict as possible. The more your presence is felt – when a guard finds a comrade you've knocked out, for example – the more difficult the levels become as the alert level is ratcheted up, along with the security of the tech in the stage and the activity of patrolling guards.

We have spent some time playing *Invisible, Inc.* on PC and we can tell you that it is far from a walk in the park, requiring a strategic mind that can think a few moves ahead when planning out turns *and* that can adapt quickly when your situation changes or something goes wrong. It's a bit like a stealth-based *XCOM* or *Frozen*



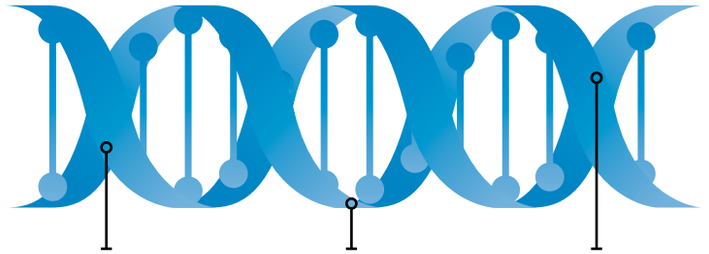
www.imagineshop.co.uk



△○×□ Hacking cameras, locked doors and other security is a key part of the game.



THE DNA OF INVISIBLE, INC.



XCOM

Permadeath, turn-based tactics, and a timed management metagame all remind us of the great *XCOM*.



DEUS EX

Its cyberpunk world full of augmentations, powerful corporations, and conspiracies, are pure *Deus Ex*.



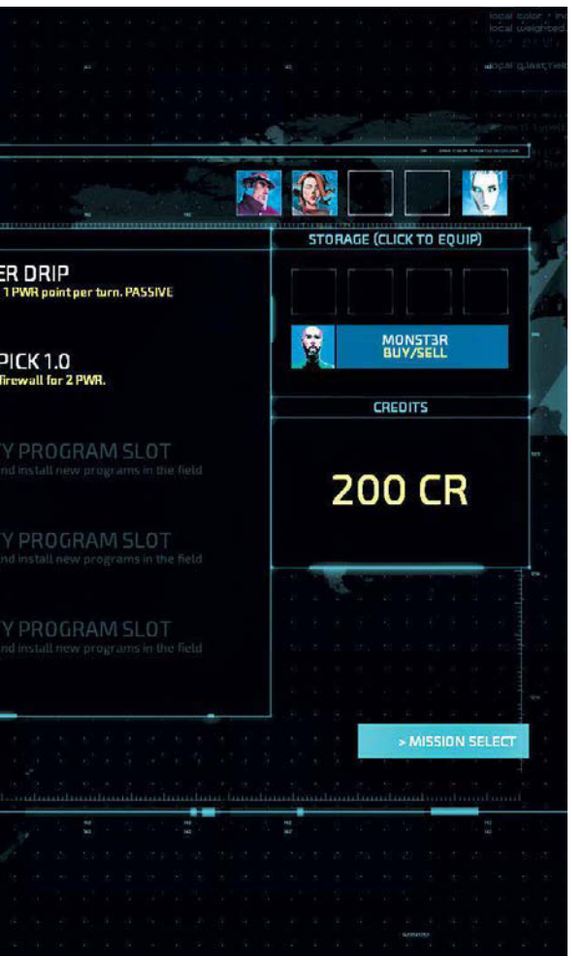
FALLOUT

You view *Invisible, Inc.* from an isometric perspective, just like the original *Fallout* games.



WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- **It's procedurally generated, meaning the game is different every time you play.**
- **Builds are highly customisable with different agents, augments and items.**
- **It offers the kind of in-depth tactical experience that's rare on PS4 right now.**
- **It's from the team that made *Don't Starve* and *Mark Of The Ninja*.**







Synapse, then – challenging, satisfying, tactical, and occasionally, punishing.

Indeed, *Invisible, Inc.* has a number of mechanics that may well be inspired by those games, even if it is completely different in terms of its tone and its focus on stealth over combat. For one, death is permanent. If an agent is downed during a mission and you don't successfully drag them to the exit, they're gone for the rest of that run, just as when your grunts get dropped by alien invaders in *XCOM*.

As in *XCOM*, there is also a larger metagame outside of what you're trying to achieve in individual missions. You've only got a certain amount of time to achieve your overall goal, limiting the number of missions you can take on. This means you have to think about the benefits and potential consequences of every one and decide which are worth your time. Take the opportunities to unlock additional agents during your playthrough as an example. No doubt you'd like to save them to add their skills to those of the agents you already have, but if that mission is going to take a massive chunk out of the time you have left, is it really worth it? Those are precisely the kind of risk-versus-reward decisions this game will constantly be asking you to make.

Speaking of risks, we don't think it's too much of one to suggest that this game will probably be worth your time on PS4, given Klei's exceptional recent run. It's far too early to say for sure, of course, but if it *can* match those standards then this game could be ace. With the *Contingency Plan* expansion and a tweaked endless mode set to be included in the PS4 edition, it's got the potential to keep you entertained for a long, long time too. Don't let this one sneak past you...

Paul Walker-Emig

INVISIBLE, INC. is being developed at Klei Entertainment. Hack its mainframe for more details (by which we mean go to **kleientertainment.com/game/invisible-inc**).

Instant Expert

ETA 2016 | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO | **DEV** PROJECT ACES

Ace Combat 7

PS4

DOGFIGHTING IS BACK

With *EVE: Valkyrie* due to come to PlayStation VR and *Ace Combat 7* announced, it seems that dogfighting is making a return (there was a free-to-play *Ace Combat* game in 2014, but that was awful, so it doesn't count). We don't expect the game to deviate too far from its usual formula – in other words, you'll get to pilot a variety of different aircraft and take to the skies to do battle with enemy forces.

VR TROOPERS

Sony has referred to *Ace Combat 7* as a PlayStation VR exclusive. That doesn't, as some people initially thought, mean that you can't play the game on PS4 if you don't have a VR headset. Sony was simply referring to the fact that *Ace Combat 7* won't be on any other VR platforms. So don't worry – you can play it on a TV if you don't end up forking out for a Playstation VR headset.

FLY IN FORMATION

One of the coolest potential aspects of *Ace Combat 7* is online multiplayer. VR battles with real players that push your dogfighting skills to the limit sound awesome and we can't wait to give them a try. However, it might also be cool to see some kind of co-op mode; we'd love to be able to tackle a more difficult version of the campaign in a formation of fighters composed of our friends!

BIG BOSS

While the aircraft you see in *Ace Combat* are realistic, we love that it chucks in huge bosses that you'd never see in real life. The behemoths that we've seen in past *Ace Combat* games will be returning, as evidenced by the sky fortress seen in the *AC7* trailer. Taking on those bosses is like a mosquito trying to take down a eagle, but that will make it all the more epic when you send them crashing down to earth.

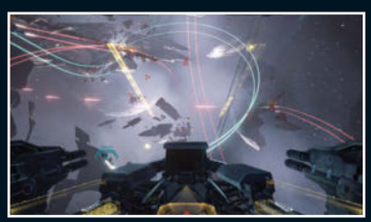
STRANGEREAL

The world in which *Ace Combat* is set has been dubbed 'Strangereal' by fans, due to the fact that while it is primarily set in fictional locations, during fictional conflicts, they all bear a resemblance to the real world. Don't worry about being up to speed on the series' story, though – the games only tend to have a passing connection and it's not as if the story is the main attraction when it comes to *Ace Combat*.

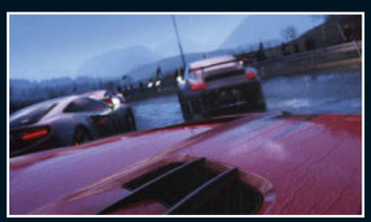
LEASE OF LIFE



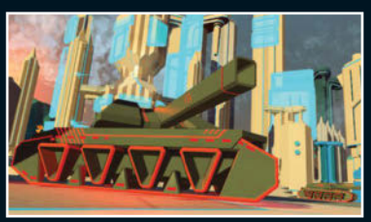
It's interesting to see how VR is making people interested in games that they wouldn't be otherwise. *Ace Combat* suddenly captivated people who didn't care about *AC* purely because of VR.



We've also seen that with *EVE*. A series that has a reputation of being a very niche interest for a subset of dedicated PC players, and that already has one bad console game to its name, is suddenly exciting again.



VR has the potential to reinvigorate games in other ways, too. We've heard people who had previously given up on *Driveclub* talking about returning to it if and when they can play the game in virtual reality.



Then there are games like *Battlezone*, a series that has become peripheral at best, suddenly thrust to the forefront by virtue of the fact that it is going to become one of the first PlayStation VR games.

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PREVIEW

A quick look at some of the other awesome games that are just around the corner

1 FULL THROTTLE REMASTERED

FORMAT: PS4, VITA
RELEASE DATE: 2016

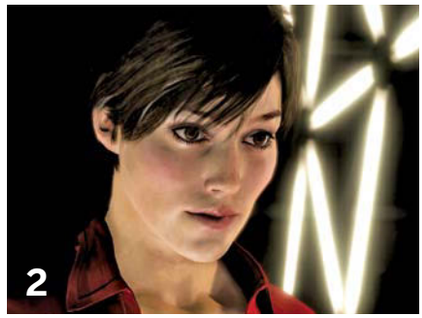
DOUBLE FINE AND Sony have teamed up once again to follow up on the remasters of *Grim Fandango* and *Day Of The Tentacle* with another LucasArts classic: *Full Throttle*. The game is another excellent Tim Schafer-directed point-and-click that tells the story of Ben, the leader of a motorcycle gang called The Polecats, who is framed for murder and must expose the true culprit. Our fond memories of this game are only tainted by the terrible motorcycle fight sections (imagine *Road Rash*, but without any of the fun). If Double Fine can fix those bits in the remaster, this will be the definitive version of the game.

2 HEAVY RAIN

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: 2 MARCH 2016

OF ALL QUANTIC Dreams' titles, *Heavy Rain* is still the one to beat. For that reason, if you've never played a Quantic Dream game before and want to see if what they do is up your street ahead of the release of *Detroit*, the PS4 release of *Heavy Rain* is probably your best bet. The game sees you play as a number of characters all connected in some way to the mystery of a serial murderer know as the Origami Killer, due to the fact that they leave an origami figure with each of their victims. Choices that you make throughout the game and succeeding or failing in set-pieces can have a huge impact on the fates of each of those characters and the ending you get when you finish it.









3 THE KING OF FIGHTERS XIV

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: 2016

WE'LL BE HONEST, *King Of Fighters XIV* doesn't *look* great, with its ugly 3D models and poor animation. Putting aside the fact that there's time for those things to be improved, looks aren't the most important thing about the new *King Of Fighters*. The most important thing is that it plays well. If developer SNK can ensure that it does, then, along with a huge roster composed of 50 characters, we think fans of the series will be happy. Will it be enough to win over more casual players with competition from *Street Fighter V*? Probably not, but something tells us that the casual market isn't what SNK is aiming for.

4 BATMAN: A TELLTALE GAME SERIES

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: 2017

WE'RE STARTING TO get a bit fatigued by Telltale games, a symptom that's caused by a combination of the sheer volume of titles the studio is churning out and their formulaic nature. Still, some of those games have been great, so we will wait until we see more of *Batman* to pass any judgement. It's going to have to be creative on the topic of giving the player agency, because we know the game is not going to give us the choice to throw The Penguin off a building or anything like that – Batman has a code and those kind of choices would violate it.





ROUNDUP





5 SHADOW COMPLEX REMASTERED

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q2 2016

IF YOU CAST your mind back to that initial vanguard of indie games that made digital titles relevant on consoles, you might think of the likes of *Braid* and *Castle Crashers*, and maybe even a game called *Shadow Complex*. Unfortunately, the game never made the transition to PS3, an oversight that is going to be corrected when its remaster hits PS4. For those of you who don't know, the game is an excellent 2.5D Metroidvania that earned a reputation as one of the best games of 2009, beating out a number of triple-A titles with bigger budgets.

6 YAKUZA 6

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: 2016

WE'VE NOW HAD our first look at *Yakuza 6* in action, with gameplay showing the way that the game will open up your options when it comes to movement and traversal. If we're honest, that aspect of what we saw didn't blow us away (even we can hop over a fence, so we're not that impressed when Kazuma does it in the game). We were more taken with the stunning recreation of Tokyo's neon-lit streets that we saw Kazuma showing off his martial arts skills in. There's just one potential problem: we don't know whether the game is going to get an EU release. We're hoping that it does, because we really want to explore that detailed world and would rather not have to learn Japanese to do it!





7 VAMPYR

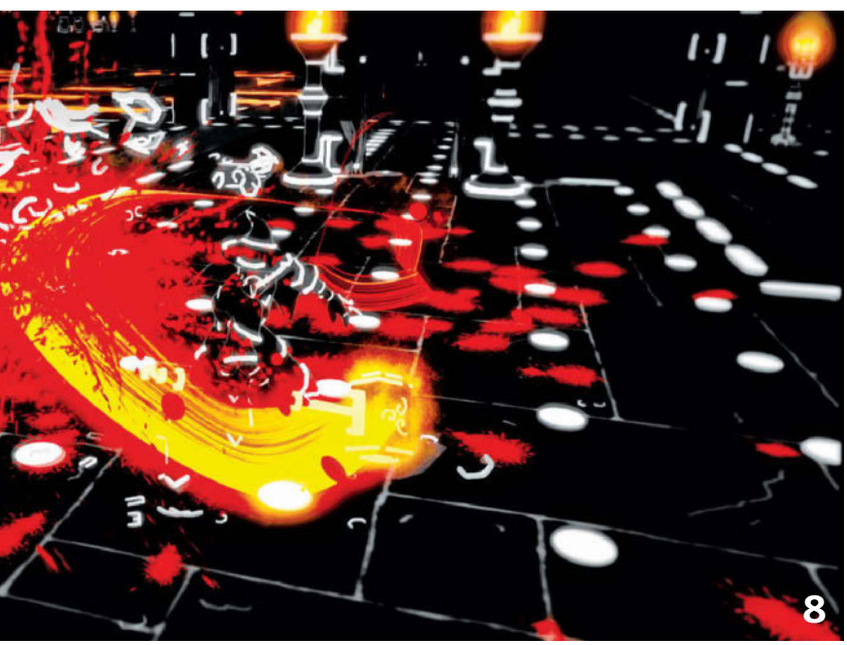
FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2016

THE NEXT GAME from the team behind *Life Is Strange* is one that we're excited about. For one, we like the fact that the game is set in the foggy streets of London in 1918; it's a time period we haven't seen a lot of games visit. What's really interesting about *Vampyr*, though, is the conflict at its heart. You play as Reid, a man who has been infected with Vampirism. That means that you need to feed. Reid, however, is a man that wants to do good – something that's difficult when you have a compulsion to chomp on the throats of humans. Trying to find a balance between those morals and Reid's condition sounds like a big part of the game, and it is something that has us very interested.

8 BRUT@L

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q2 2016

THE PLAY HIVEMIND can't quite decide whether *Brut@l*'s retro, ASCII-inspired visuals are brilliant or awful, so we'll leave that up to you to decide. What we can tell you for sure is that the game is a procedurally generated dungeon-crawler in which you choose to play as a Ranger, Mage, Warrior and Amazon, and then try to battle your way to the 26th floor and claim the crown from the Guardian Of The Dungeon. We're not yet sure how technical the game's combat is, but we're guessing it will lean towards a hack-and-slash style. *Brut@l* also has crafting and leveling systems, support for co-op play and a tool that lets you create your own levels for the game, which sounds cool.



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HOT TOPIC
DIGITAL GAMES

LUKE ALBIGÉS
EDITOR, PLAY



I'M NOT ABOUT to stick my neck out and claim that the fact that we're losing sometimes important parts of gaming history is somehow a good thing. That's just false. What I will say, however, is that the delisting of certain games should serve as a wake-up call to developers and publishers who are still doing things in an old-fashioned way that simply doesn't work in today's increasingly digital market.

Take *Out Run Online Arcade*, for instance – a superb racer that was pulled from PSN a few years back due to license expiry. What, in reality, did having officially licensed Ferraris actually add to the game? Nothing. All it did was ensure that once the licence was up, the game could no longer be distributed which, for a digital release, means sold. It's gone, and all it would have taken is for a few slight design tweaks on some Generic Red Sports Cars and it'd still be available. Same goes for *After Burner Climax,* although I'd argue that the decision to license *planes* was even more ludicrous than cars for an arcade game. Lesson one: pointless licences need to stop, or better, more forward-thinking terms need to be agreed.

Some games – primarily rhythm-action ones – are naturally trickier from a licensing perspective, so perhaps we simply need full disclosure on the terms of the deal in such cases. If a game or DLC pack is only going to be available for a limited time, this simply needs to be made clear on its marketplace listing from the off. Part of the problem with things disappearing from PSN is the surprise nature of each vanishing act – at least if fans know that something is a limited time release, they'd be able to make more informed buying choices rather than panic-buying mere hours before it's gone for good. Lesson two: tell people what they're actually buying.

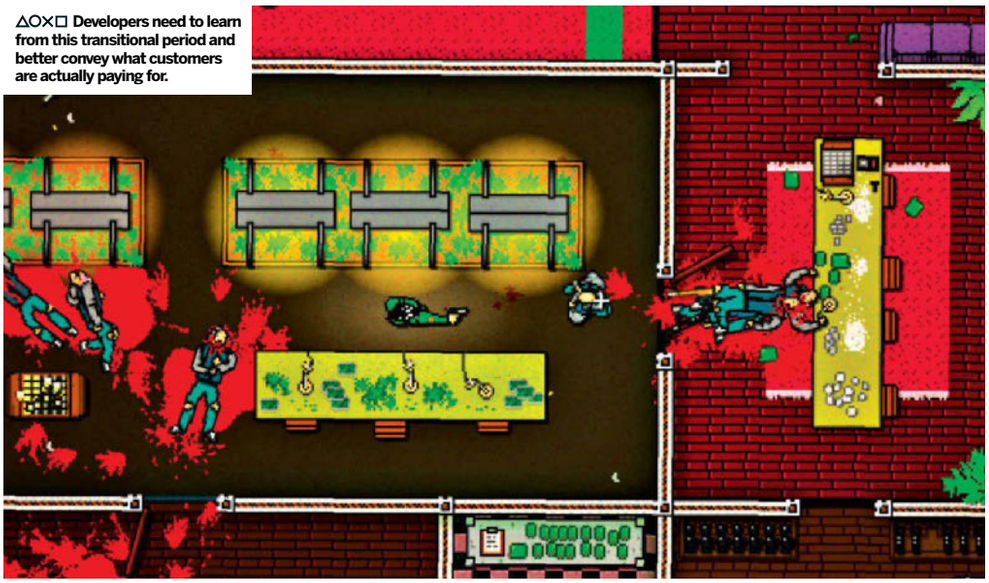
Sony, like the other platform holders, also needs to allay fears by making the exit strategy for PS3 clear. While the odd game going missing from PSN is far from ideal, the closure of an entire platform (as will inevitably occur at some point in the not-too-distant future) will erase a huge chunk of gaming history. People are worried – and rightly so – about what will happen to all the games they own (and even those they don't) when the servers eventually go down, so there needs to be a clear plan for not only supporting paying customers but also preserving gaming history.







△○×□ **Developers need to learn from this transitional period and better convey what customers are actually paying for.**



Ultimately, the convenience factor – who doesn't love having a new game pre-installed and playable from midnight on launch day? – and financial savings of digital publishing means this digital-only trend is only going to grow more prevalent. When costs are as high as they are and getting to market is far more realistic for a self-published digital release, it's the only way a lot of new releases will ever see light of day, in fact. Moaning about it isn't going to get us anywhere – we just need to rally developers and publishers to be more mindful about future-proofing their releases and to ensure entire generations of games are preserved for the players of tomorrow to enjoy. It may already be too late to save a lot of PS3 and PSP games, but there's still hope for the future...



DARRAN JONES
EDITOR, RETRO GAMER

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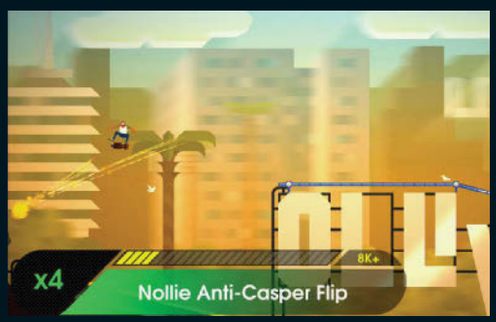
I DON'T LIKE change. I'm a 42-year-old gamer who can still remember when games came on cassette tapes and when Han shot first in *Star Wars* (only idiots call it *A New Hope*). It probably won't surprise you to learn that digital games can "get in the sea" as **Play**'s illustrious Designer might say. I'm far less eloquent than Liam and would simply use something along the lines of "get f**ked" but hey, nobody's perfect.

I come from a time before the internet, a time where games came in boxes and the boxes contained lovely posters, T-shirts, coloured instruction books and other pieces of lovely merchandise. I come from a time when you'd lovingly build a collection of SNES and Mega Drive games. Not to play them, of course, but to gaze at their beauty as they took up precious space in your bedroom.

Digital products don't offer any of this. Digital products have effectively killed off collecting for me, and that makes me sad. I was a massive fan of the PlayStation Vita. I still am to a point, and at one stage I had around 80 games. As it became more and more obvious that the machine was doomed, Sony and many others either abandoned the machine completely or went over to digital. I can't get excited about digital products. You forget you have them and they sit unplayed and unloved on your hard drive. It becomes pointless buying into digital as a collector because if that system goes unsupported by the publisher, you're screwed. I hate the fact that there are games available on Vita and even on PS4 that I can never properly own. It's rubbish and makes the old git in me seethe.

△○×□ If and when PSN finally closes, games like the excellent *Rogue Legacy* stand to be lost forever...









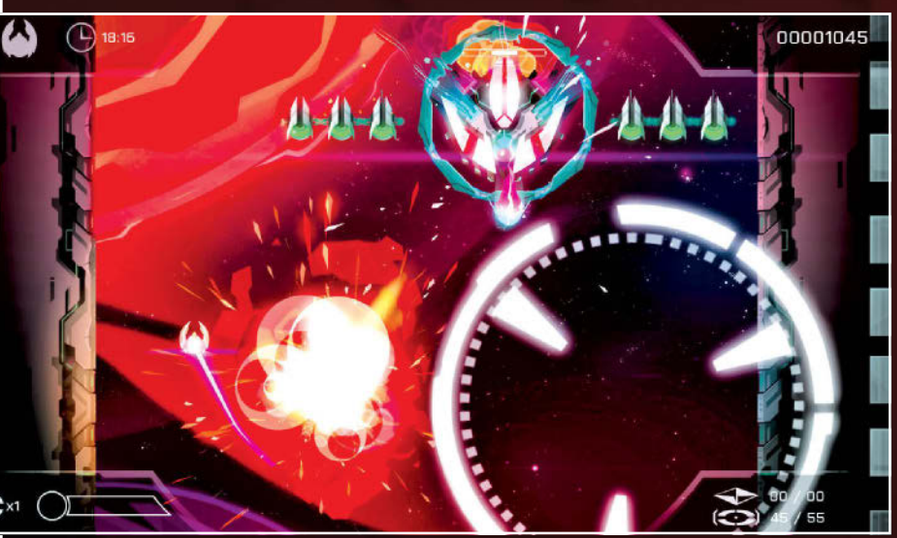
I hate the pricing structure of digital games, too. Yes I know that £15 for a game like *Rogue Legacy* or some other indie game that I can't remember but Paul will have etched into his indie-obsessed brain is arguably decent value for money, but another part of me – the part that longs for a physical product that I can hold in my hands and place on my shelf – doesn't. That person is baffled at why digital games sell for obscene prices and wonders why idiots are prepared to spend £90 on an insubstantial version of *Star Wars Battlefront* that's nothing more than a series of ones and zeroes. It's odd, scary, unnatural and I just don't like it.

I know that this is my own issue and that I should be willing to embrace change, but not all change is good and charging wallet-gouging prices for games that have been £20 or less for the past three months is greed, nothing more. Sales are certainly getting better, having more parity with the Steam sales I so love (£3.74 is my sweet spot) but publishers are deluding themselves if they think it's acceptable to charge £50 for the excellent *Dariusburst*, just because it's on PS4.

Digital is still in its infancy and it's obvious that many of these issues will be ironed out in later years, but it's never going to replace my love of physical games, which is why I'll never be able to love the PS4 and Vita in the same way I gushed over my PSP and PS3.

THE INDIE JOURNEY

How does an indie game go from concept to release, and what does that tell us about what Sony is really like? We speak to the developers behind OlliOlli, Velocity, and The Unfinished Swan to find out...





When talking about the fateful meeting that led to *OlliOlli* coming to Playstation, Roll7's Simon Bennett recalls, "We sat down and said, 'Here's the stuff we've been doing and here's our pedigree as a business outfit,' and they just really weren't interested. We showed them a game we'd made for kids with ADHD – no interest there. We showed another thing we'd done previously – again, no interest. Tom [Hegarty, one of Roll7's founders], seeing that there was no interest said to Shahid [Ahmad, former director of strategic content at SCEE], well, why don't we show you our skateboarding game?"

It's a suggestion that would seem to make sense. After all, it was that skateboarding game that got Roll7 the meeting with PlayStation in the first place, after a chance encounter with Futurlab's James Marsden. Roll7 showed him the game at a conference because he "was wearing skate shoes" and looked like "he might be into skate stuff". He liked the game, and introduced the studio to Shahid with a simple email that read: "PlayStation, meet Roll7. Roll7, meet PlayStation. FIGHT!". However. Roll7's John Ribbins, who had developed what was, at the time, a very basic prototype of the skateboarding videogame, wasn't willing to let Sony see a game that he felt wasn't yet ready to show.

Fortunately, Hegarty was more wary about letting this opportunity pass them by. "Tom kicked John under the table," Bennett tells us, "like, 'Show him the f***ing game, dude!' At that point, John finally acquiesced and passed the iPad over to Shahid," Bennett continues. "Shahid disappeared for 30-odd minutes into the game while the conversations continued about other things. Then he turned himself around to the whole table and said, 'I want this on PlayStation Vita'."

That anecdote highlights a couple of things about the process of a game from an indie studio finding its way onto PlayStation. Firstly, Sony seems to have an eye for a good idea, even when it's an idea that's yet to be developed to its potential. Secondly, that getting your game on PlayStation may involve a bit of luck.



△○×□ Just looking at this picture from *OlliOlli* makes our thumbs hurt. So many crippling high-score battles...

Indeed, while the aforementioned James Marsden of Futurlab, the studio behind *Velocity* and *Velocity 2X*, spent "years making Flash games and corporate websites before I'd reached a level of experience where I thought we were worthy of pitching to PlayStation", he still feels that there was still a little luck involved along with the hard work when it came to getting a game on console. "There are windows of opportunity that open up for sometimes only weeks or days at a time," he says. "We were fortunate to have come along with *Velocity* when one of those windows [happened to be] open."

But Marsden shouldn't sell himself too short, because if there's something that his story of getting the attention of Sony reinforces, it's that idea that Sony is willing to invest in teams that show they have something a little different to offer.

"I knew we had to make an impact," says Marsden, explaining why he decided §to approach Sony with a bizarre pitch in his first meeting with the publisher. The game Marsden was showing off had heavy ARG (alternate reality game) elements, so he made the pitch itself into something of an ARG, conducting the meeting as if Futurlab was interviewing the PlayStation employees across the table for a job. Futurlab presented the game to senior producer Phil Gaskell after secretly imputing a keycode that, after a certain amount of time had elapsed, popped up with a message saying, "NEW USER DETECTED, PHILLIP GASKELL. UNAUTHORIZED. CHECKING HISTORY," before the game pulled up a load of data the team had nicked from his LinkedIn page. "The execs had to excuse themselves from the room for five minutes to discuss what they'd just witnessed," Marsden recalls with a smile. "Then they came back in and the head of the department shook my hand, saying it was one of the finest pitches he'd ever seen."

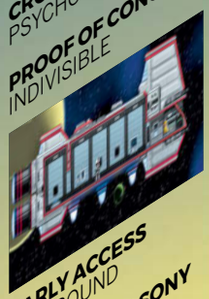
The game that was pitched never actually got made, but the take-away from that story is that, just as with Roll7, Sony didn't really care about the developer's level of experience. What it wanted to see was a cool game; it wanted to see innovative ideas. Show Sony that you have that, or have the potential to produce that, and it seems that it is willing to back you.

Giant Sparrow creative director Ian Dallas found that out when Sony came to *him* asking about the student project that become *The Unfinished Swan*. "I just started off making a little prototype as part of a research project I was working on and then I took the game to some

PROGRESS REPORT

CROWDFUNDED
PSYCHONAUTS 2

PROOF OF CONCEPT
INDIVISIBLE



EARLY ACCESS
STARBOUND

SIGNED WITH SONY
BRUTAL

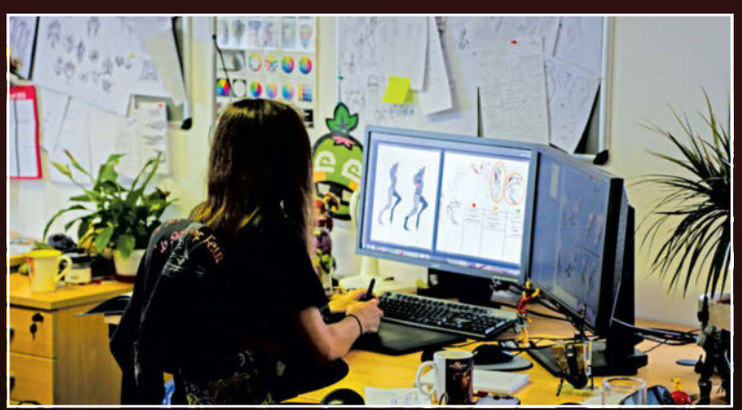
PLAYABLE BUILD SHOWN
WHAT REMAINS OF EDITH FINCH

IMMINENT RELEASE
SHELTERED



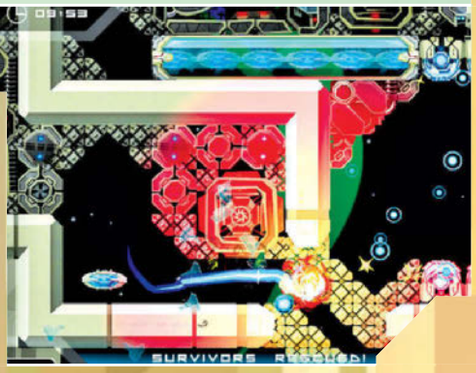
OUT NOW
NOT A HERO





△○×□ Futurlab hard at work on *Velocity 2X* at their office in Hove.

"SOME PEOPLE OVER AT SONY SAW A YOUTUBE VIDEO OF THE PRESENTATION AND THEN SENT AN EMAIL OR GAVE ME A CALL"







festivals," Dallas explains. "I showed it in 2008 – I think it was the very first Sense Of Wonder Night at the Tokyo Game Show. Some people over at Sony saw a YouTube video of the presentation and then sent an email or gave me a call and were interested in talking more."

It's interesting to note that even with the project in a state where Dallas *himself* "didn't really know what the game was going to be", Sony could already see the potential in him and his prototype.

"Sony was really early," says Dallas. "This was when it was just a prototype and they were already saying, 'Hey, what are you doing?' By GDC of the next year, I was going around to other publishers saying, 'Hey, anyone else interested?' It wasn't even close," he continues. "So not only was Sony the first, it was the most knowledgeable and had the most interest in the game. [For] everybody else, it was a really hard sell to get them interested in this weird unusual thing. I think the closest thing we got was someone going, 'Well, maybe this could work on DS...'"

This gives us an important insight into what Sony looks for in its indies. While it obviously tries to position itself as the home of blockbuster titles, Sony has also actively worked to cultivate an image of PlayStation as a home for games you wouldn't see anywhere else. Sure, to some extent, that's about marketing. But, when we think of the works of Studio Japan, curios like *Vib-Ribbon* and *Noby Noby Boy*, games like *Journey* and *Papa & Yo*, and *then* we hear about Sony actively chasing down odd little indie titles like *The Unfinished Swan* that are too weird for other publishers, we have to concede that Sony *really is* on the hunt for original and, occasionally, bizarre games, in a way that other big publishers aren't.

That brings us to another aspect of PlayStation's image. You may well remember Sony making a lot of fuss about how developer-friendly it is around the release of the PS4, positioning itself as a conduit for creators to realise their visions. But does that really represent what it is *actually* like to work with Sony behind the scenes? Surely things aren't so open and idyllic as that? Well, according to the developers we spoke to, it actually is.

"We decided that all the content in the game you had to skate over wouldn't be procedurally generated by your own music library, which was one of our original ideas," said Bennett. "When we went and justified why that wouldn't be there, John explained it over 20 minutes, and Shahid said afterwards, 'Yeah, I don't really care, I just wanted to see how long you would try and justify it for.' That's when he said, 'Look, guys, this is your game. You make the decisions that are right for you.' That was a really big moment for us," Bennett continues, "where we went: 'Oh, okay then, we can do what we want!'"

Dallas has had a similar experience with Sony, describing PlayStation as being "extremely hands-off" from a creative standpoint. "Sometimes we'll come with questions and we'll



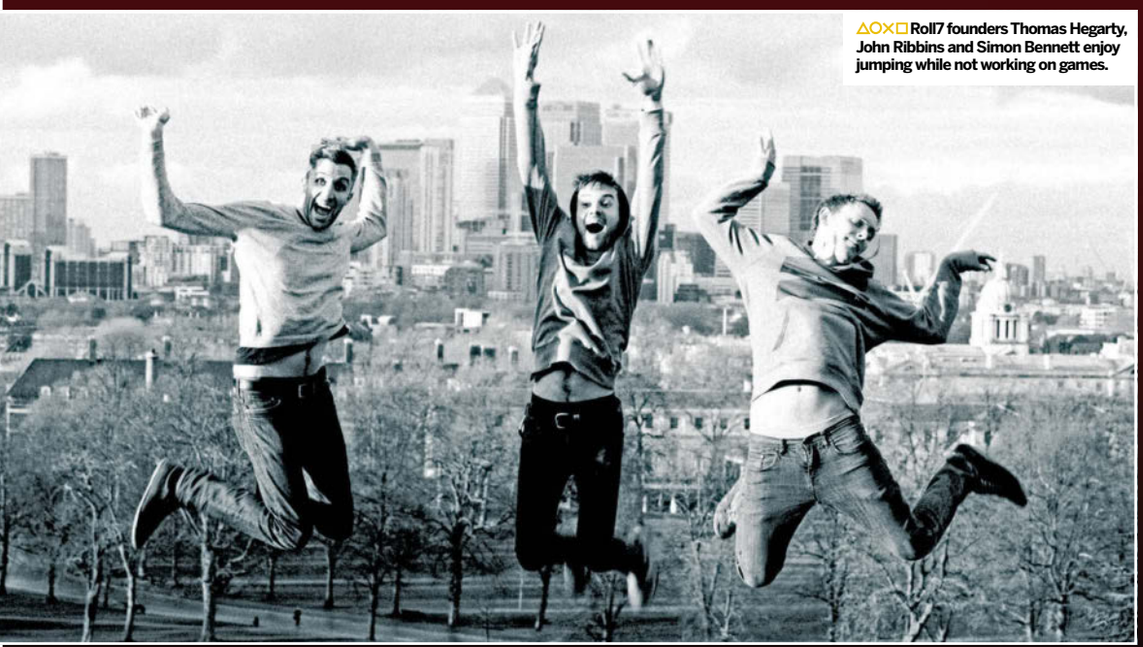


say, 'This isn't really working right, we've got a couple of options, what do you feel would be a good approach?'" Dallas says. "But we've never had situations where Sony was dictating anything."

That even extended to times when Giant Sparrow failed to meet the milestones that it had agreed to hit in its contract with Sony. "With any game, it's hard to decide before you really know much about the game what you're going to be doing six months from now and contractually agree to that," Dallas explains. "We came up with something that was originally about a year and a half for development and I think maxed out at five people. The game eventually ended up taking closer to three years and 14 people at the end of it. It diverged pretty severely and about a year into development, when we were ostensibly meant to be done, it was kind of obvious we weren't going to make the deadline. We were working on something very different from the paint splatting – a lot of it was the vine-growing mechanic, which ended up shipping, but for a long time we didn't really know what it was going to be and we were lost a bit," Dallas continues. "I had a meeting with the head of Sony Santa Monica and she basically said: 'This is not what we expected, but it looks really interesting, so please just keep doing what you're doing.' It was very encouraging. That was one of the big reasons we decided to work with Sony. It felt like it understood what it was getting in to and the messiness of working on something that isn't like any other games that were out there."

It's great to hear that Sony gives its developers that kind of creative freedom, but we also wanted to know more about the ways in which Sony *does* get involved to make a game better on the journey from conception to release. Bennett gave us an example of the huge difference working with PlayStation can make for a small indie developer, telling us that *OlliOlli* would have been a very different (and probably not very fun) game, were it not for Sony.

"WE HAVE NEVER HAD SITUATIONS WHERE SONY WAS DICTATING ANYTHING"



△○×□ Roll7 founders Thomas Hegarty, John Ribbins and Simon Bennett enjoy jumping while not working on games.

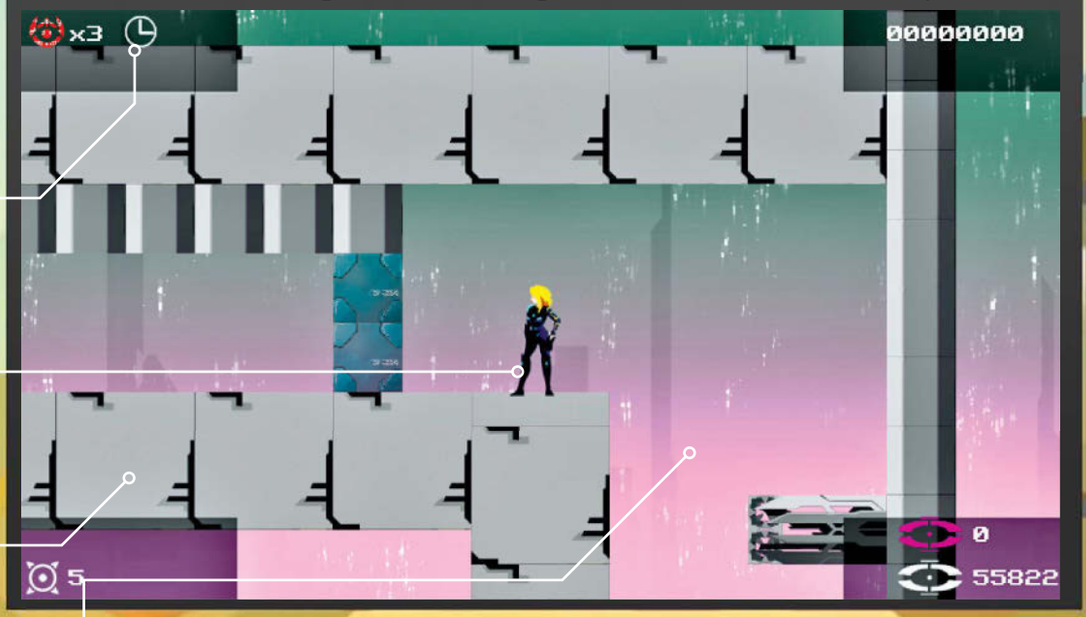
"At first-playable we took them a basic prototype and they had their testers come and play it and that was absolutely crucial," Bennett explains. Up until that point, *OlliOlli* was a far more brutal game that would only accepting perfect landings, but when we saw that one Sony playtester was totally incapable of playing it – he couldn't land perfectly once – Roll7 realised things needed to change.

"It was this realisation that maybe there needs to be some granularity to the landing system – that came directly from meeting them," says Bennett. "I think that's the first time we started to get that idea of humility. The idea that no feature, or control, or mechanic that we're using is complete until someone can just pick it up and get the hang of it in an appropriate amount of time and that's when we started going really heavy on testing.

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GAME CHANGERS

Futurlab took us behind the scenes with some early shots of Velocity 2X to show how much a game can change over the course of development



TIME FOR CHANGE
This blocky placeholder version of the game's UI was transformed into something more elegant and in keeping with the game's overall design for the final release.

A NEW STAR
The biggest change from *Velocity* to *2X* was the introduction of sections where you hop out of your ship to take part in platforming sections.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL
Seeing the game at this stage, you feel like you're looking at the building blocks of a level. Detail was added to the environment for the final build of the game.

SEEING THE LIGHT
Compare this with the finished game you'll notice how much difference lighting makes. It plays a crucial role in giving *Velocity 2X* its depth and atmosphere.



△○×□ The distinctive visual style of *The Unfinished Swan* hints towards a game packed with unique ideas.

PlayStation started that for us," Bennett continues. "I think we got about a hundred people in for *OlliOlli* over the period of development. It was that constant iteration. We realised that without that, we would likely make a game that is either too hard, or just too abstracted for people to actually pick up and play comfortably."

For Dallas and Giant Sparrow, the most important aspect of working with Sony is that it gave them the financial security and infrastructural support to "focus on making the game" that the team had envisioned (though it's worth noting that doesn't reflect the experience of all developers – Roll7 was taking a big financial risk when it made *OlliOlli* and Futurlab had to use the cash from its *Velocity* PS Plus deal to finish its game).

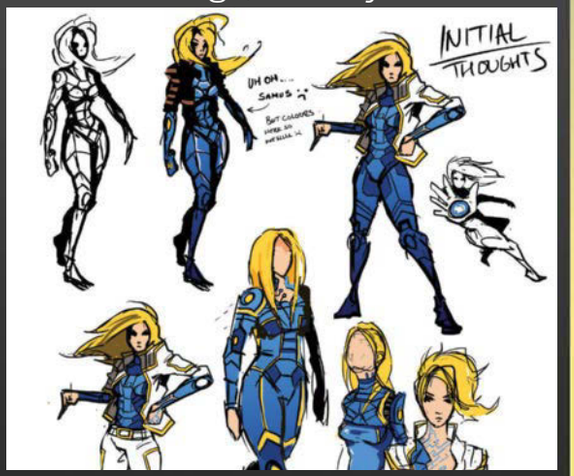
Dallas told us that Giant Sparrow *could* have made a version of the game without Sony – it was offered funding from the Integrated Grant Fund, for example – but it wouldn't have been the game they wanted to make. "We're trying to do something that is unusual, but relatively accessible and that feels luxurious. There's a point where it needs a certain level of production value in order to get across that feeling. I think similarly, with our next game, *Edith Finch*, making something that feels like classy horror requires a certain production value in order to get across. If you're working with a very small number of people, it's in danger of becoming something like *Blair Witch*, which is cool, but that isn't what we were doing. The game just wouldn't be possible without a certain investment on the part of Sony."

Lest we think that things are always smooth when working with a big company like Sony, it's worth bearing in mind that things don't always go as planned. Futurlab reveals that the first thing it did for Sony was working on an ARG component of *Heavy Rain* that was meant to create interest in the lead-up to the game's release. Unfortunately, the project was cancelled after nine months. "We've had as many false starts as we have successes," Marsden admits.

As far as we're concerned, the excellent *Velocity* games prove things worked out

EARLY ACCESS

We get a glimpse into the process of character design, courtesy of Futurlab



This concept art from development of *Velocity 2X* shows off Futurlab's early ideas for protagonist Kai, experimenting with different colour schemes, clothing, hair styles and visualizations for technological enhancement. Futurlab continued to iterate on the design of the character over time (in part for being to similar to *Metroid*'s Samus!), but you can already see the core of the character that became Kai in these early sketches.

for Futurlab in the end, but we were curious about what Sony's reaction was to the games was and how it measured success: is it about quality, or is it about sales?

"At this level, with a small team and a relatively low financial risk, it's all about whether the game is good or not," says Marsden. "We have had lots of support from PlayStation over the last few years, and it's been in the interest of getting good games onto its PlayStation platforms – that's the sole purpose."

When we ask Bennett about Sony's reaction to *OlliOlli* when Roll7 submitted the final version of the game and were preparing for release, we get a similar impression of how the publisher measures its own success.

"This shows what experience they have and what they know: they were all really confident," Bennett tells us. "They were like, 'This game is great, we love it.' We just thought that was classic, you know... our producer and marketing guys just saying that because that's what they say. We did a debrief meeting and our expectations were that the game was going to totally bomb and that this was the end of the studio – I'm not overstating that. When the scores came out, all of us were so confused," he continues. "But PlayStation was super hyped about the game to the end, to the point that it signed *OlliOlli 2* before *OlliOlli* had been released. At the time we thought it must be mental. Why wouldn't you just wait until [*OlliOlli*] came out? I think from their perspective – and this is why we love PlayStation – they saw that it would be a long time before we saw any money from the game and that we were delivering. It was about keeping our studio afloat and focused on our next IP to build this thing *OlliOlli* and it's been awesome."

Perhaps there are developers out there who have had far worse experiences with Sony. Perhaps the company is far more draconian when it comes to bigger budget titles. Or perhaps Sony really is just that open and helpful with indie teams. All we can say is that the stories of these developers who have traveled the road to PlayStation paints a picture of Sony as a company that is remarkably similar to the one that its marketing machine has tried to make us envision in our minds – that is, as a company that puts the power of creativity in the hands of creators.

In that respect, while Sony deserves credit for spotting and supporting people with good ideas, the experience of these developers proves that the road to PlayStation is really about the developers themselves. Sure, Sony provides support where its needed – bringing Giant Sparrow



△○×□ *OlliOlli 2* led to some ridiculously competitive score battles in our office. We won, of course.





"THE BEST THING SONY DOES IS GET OUT OF THE WAY OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS"



△○×□ Proof that it doesn't take a huge team to make great games.

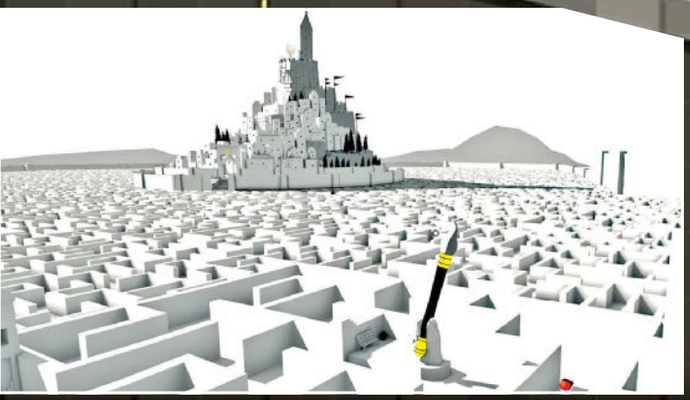




into Sony Santa Monica and funding its work; changing Roll7's perspective by giving it access to testers; giving Futurlab a deal that let it get over the line developing *Velocity* – but it is up to the creators to deliver the quality games everyone wants to see at the end of the process.

Marsden sums this notion up nicely: "The best thing Sony does is get out of the way of the creative process. Having the support to make something like *Velocity 2X* – even having the belief in the initial idea – is all you can really ask from a platform holder or publisher."

And when a small developer is given that freedom to create, when it completes that journey to PlayStation, it really can make them. "Until *Velocity 2X*, we had to do the calling around, but after *Velocity 2X*, we've been getting calls from the biggest players in the industry," says Marsden. "All because Sony gave us the freedom."





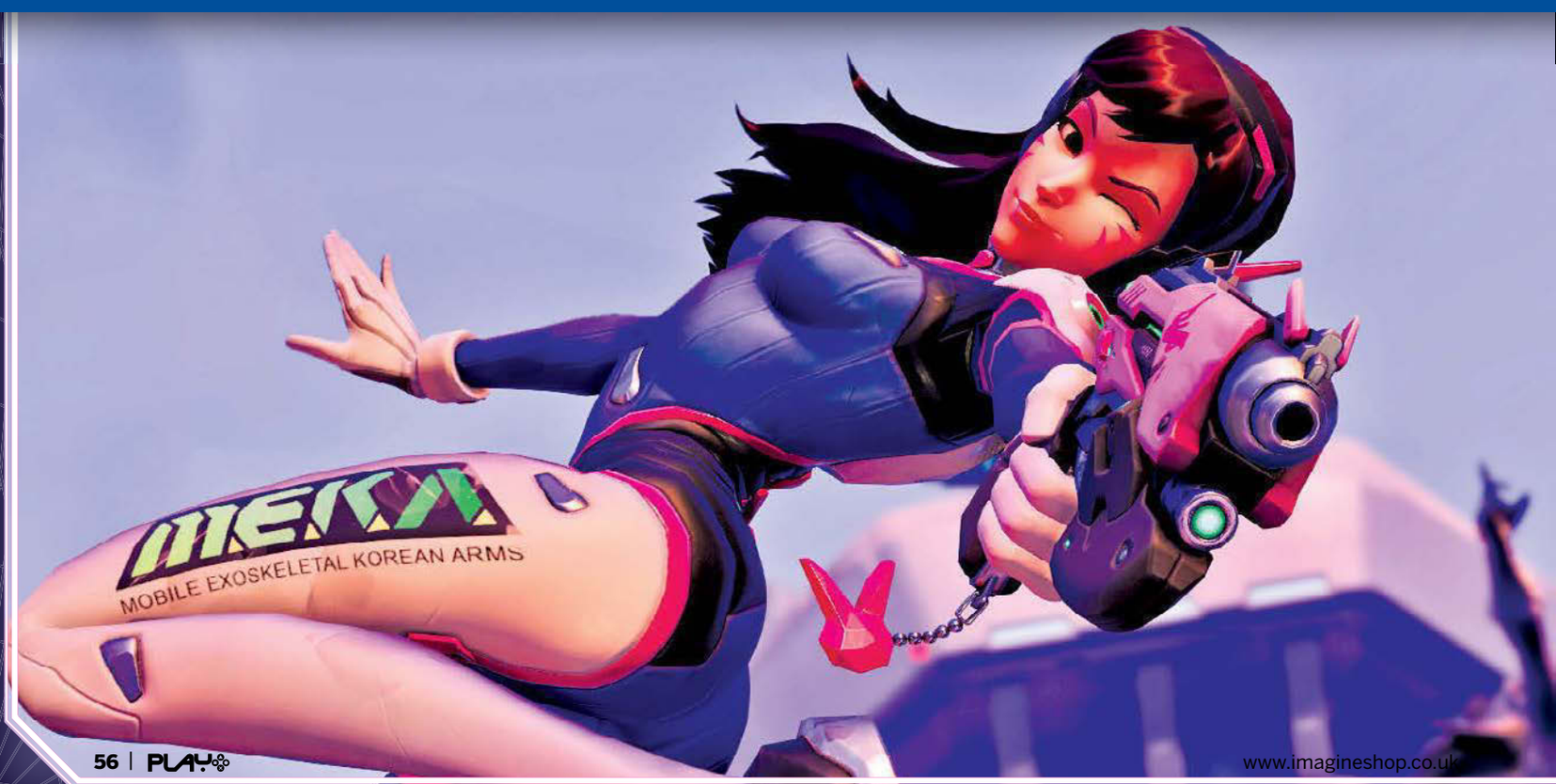


△○×□ Getting games into the public eye at expos is vital for indies.



RISE OF THE MOBA

The biggest genre in gaming prepares to take PlayStation by storm

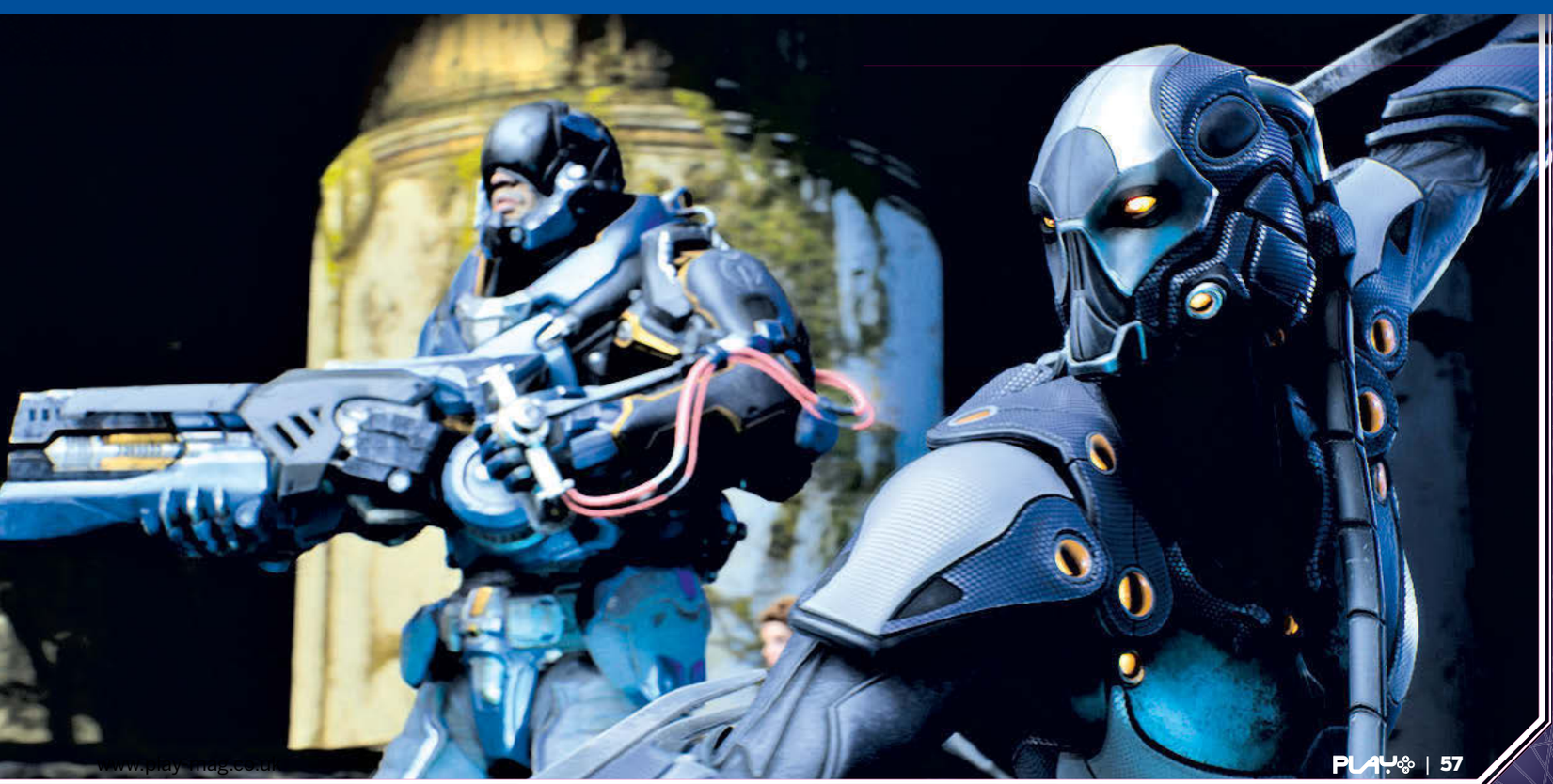


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Something very significant could be about to happen on PS4: the arrival of the MOBA. Don't think that's a big deal? Well, what if we told you that *League Of Legends* – the biggest MOBA on PC – has up to 67 million players a month and peaks with concurrent players of up to 7.5 million? To put that into context, Valve recently announced a concurrent player record of 12 million for Steam, meaning that *League* – *one game* – comfortably attracts more than half the amount of players every month that Steam has playing *all* of the games on the platform at its peak. Oh, and guess what the most played game on Steam was on the day it broke its concurrent player record? It was *Dota 2* – a MOBA. The point that we are making here is that the MOBAs are indisputably a massive part of gaming and deserve your attention if you've never given them a second look before.

Yet, despite the genre's huge success, it's often, paradoxically, seen as a niche interest. That impression in part comes from the genre's reputation for complexity and the perception that it requires a prohibitive amount of dedication. Then there is the fact that, rightly or wrongly, its player base is seen as being particularly insular, to the point that many associate MOBA players with being hostile to newcomers. There's another reason that MOBAs have that





△○×□ Do you hate the sound of MOBAs? Don't worry, *Battleborn* has non-MOBA modes as well.

outlier reputation, though – the fact that the genre has yet to truly arrive on console.

Sure, there have been forays onto PlayStation – *Awesomenauts* brought a simplified 2D version of the genre to PS3 and you can download the free-to-play *Invokers Tournament* on PS4 – but there has not yet been that standout title that's really made an impression on consoles. We are still waiting for that PlayStation title that announces with authority: "MOBAs have arrived and they're here to stay".

That could all be about to change with a number of big developers looking to help the MOBA make the transition to PS4. There's the team behind *Borderlands* preparing to unleash *Battleborn* and former *Gears Of War* developer Epic working on *Paragon*, which was revealed at PlayStation Experience last December. If there's a time for the MOBA to finally make that leap to PS4 and gain a foothold on console, it is now, and it will surely be this new wave of console-friendly titles that will do it.

WHAT IS A MOBA?

One of the big challenges that any game billing itself as a MOBA will face on console is that a lot of people still aren't entirely clear what a MOBA actually is, so let us spell it out for you. The acronym MOBA stands for Multiplayer Online Battle Arena. There are two teams who each have some kind of base or structure that they are trying to protect. If you can destroy the opposing team's base, you win. Assisting each team are weak AI-controlled units called creeps that

THE DAWN OF A NEW CONSOLE GENRE

The vanguard of PS4 MOBAs



TRANS-GALACTIC TOURNAMENT

PUB: KIZ STUDIOS
DEV: HIBERNUM CREATIONS
ETA: 2016

Of all the MOBAs we've talked about, this is the one that *looks* the most like a MOBA, with an isometric view and visualisation of attacks that's not a million miles away from what you would see in *Dota 2* or *League Of Legends*. Don't worry, though – despite that PC look, this is a game that's specifically being designed for consoles.



PALADINS

PUB: HI-REZ STUDIOS
DEV: IN-HOUSE
ETA: 2016

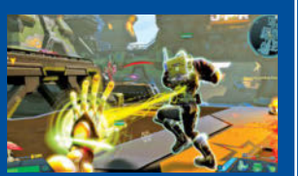
Paladins is a game that's taking an approach to bringing the MOBA to PS4 that's similar to the one being employed with *Battleborn* in that it mixes elements of the genre with first-person shooting. You take a deck of cards into each match that augment your character's abilities and, in classic MOBA fashion, level them in-match to become more powerful. Something that's a little different is that you have a mount you can use for fast-travel.



OVERWATCH

PUB: BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
DEV: IN-HOUSE
ETA: Q2 2016

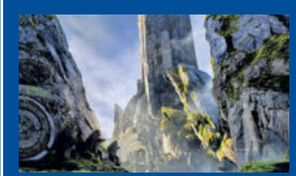
This game isn't a MOBA per se, but it is emblematic of the way that the genre is straining to have a large influence on other types of games. This is most obvious in its large roster of characters that are designed to play in different ways and perform particular roles that will be familiar to MOBA players. Support characters, for example, perform the same role as they would in a MOBA in that they are used to heal or buff your allies and debuff your enemies.



BATTLEBORN

PUB: 2K GAMES
DEV: GEARBOX SOFTWARE
ETA: 3 MAY 2016

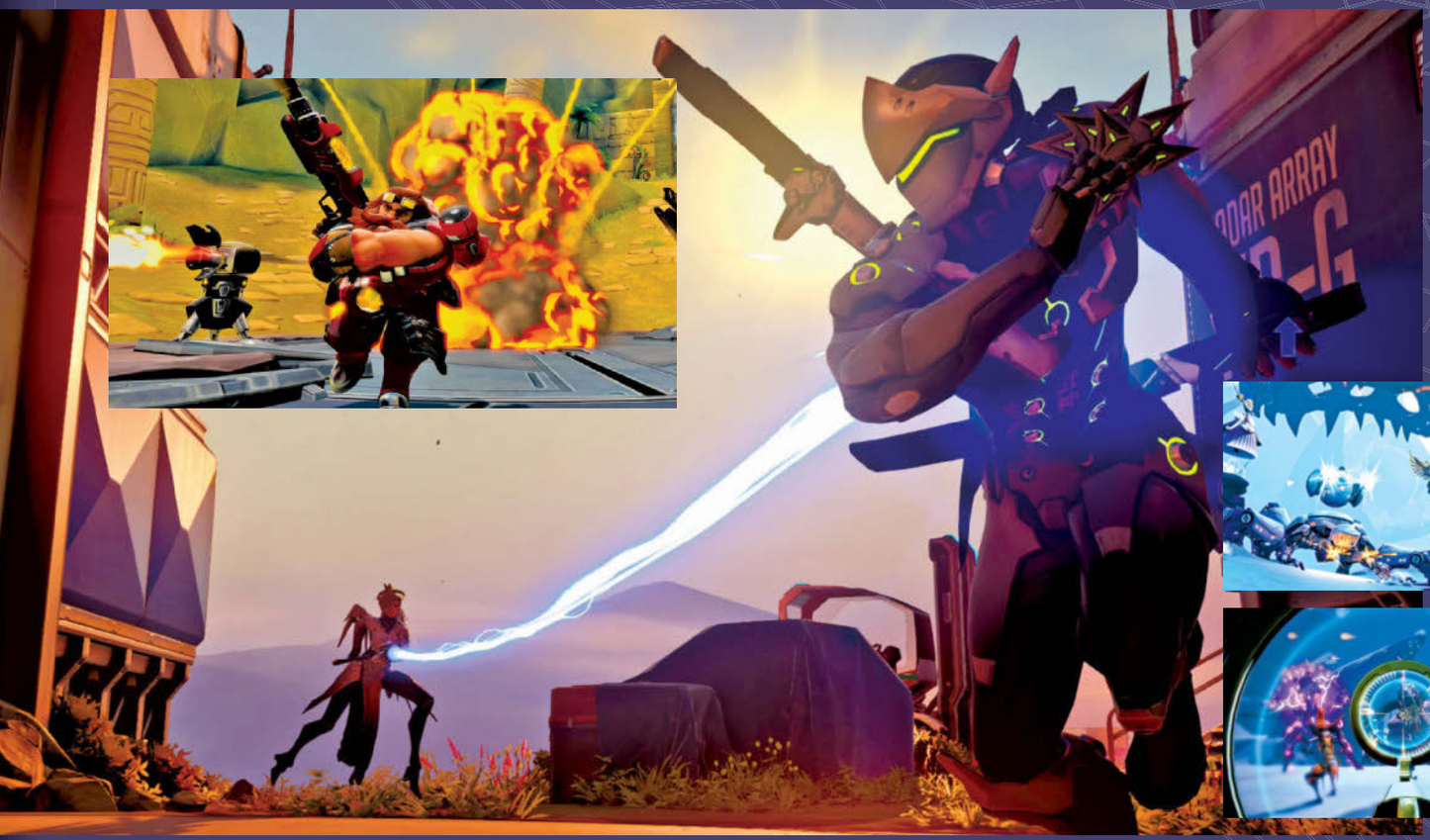
This game does have a campaign and non-MOBA-based multiplayer modes that will be familiar to FPS fans, but it also has a mode that very much follows the MOBA template. Even outside of that mode, the stamp of the MOBA genre is unmistakable – there are AI creeps to deal with alongside human-controlled heroes, and a large roster of characters that includes mushroom-headed aliens, commandos, robots, sorceresses, archers and more.



PARAGON

PUB: EPIC GAMES
DEV: IN-HOUSE
ETA: 2016

This third-person MOBA from the team behind the *Gears Of Wars* series is already looking pretty slick, but nothing that Epic has shown off is final. The reason Epic has revealed the game earlier than it normally would is that it wants to get the game out there in the form of alphas and betas to get lots of player feedback – something that makes sense for a multiplayer title where getting the balance between a roster of diverse characters right is vital.



move down preset paths towards the enemy base. A key part of MOBAs revolves around taking out these creatures, not only to stop them getting to your base, but to make your character more powerful so that you have more of an advantage when you come up against other, more dangerous, human-controlled characters.

Another huge part of MOBAs is the diversity of those characters. There is typically a large roster to choose from, with each character geared towards performing a particular role and possessing unique abilities that are upgraded from scratch over the course of each match, rather than carrying over from game to game. The fact that each character is built to perform specific roles means that communication and teamwork are vital parts of being successful in a game like this. *Rainbow Six Siege* is a pretty good reference point for those of you who have played it – in that game, teams that talk to each other and prioritise the squad over solo play will destroy those that do the opposite. MOBAs are the same, so expect to be on your headset when you're playing them.

"A HUGE PART OF MOBAS IS THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR CHARACTERS. THERE IS TYPICALLY A LARGE ROSTER TO CHOOSE FROM"

△○×□ *Paragon* looks to be the PS4's first *true* MOBA, comparable with *Smite* on the Xbox One and PC.



We are going to see these basic facets of the MOBA genre carried over with those games that come to PS4, but each game won't necessarily bring *every* element of the MOBA template along with them. Each game will vary in terms of what it keeps and what it discards and there are naturally going to have to be changes made to accommodate the fact that we are going to be playing these games with a pad, rather than a mouse and keyboard.

Take *Battleborn* as an example. The key elements of a MOBA are there – destroying the enemy base as an objective; the large roster of characters to choose from; AI-controlled creeps – but where traditional MOBAs play similarly to classic RTS games, this MOBA plays as a first-person shooter. It's clear why Gearbox made this particular design decision – it knows that console audiences are familiar with that kind of game, so by pitching it as a FPS rather than a MOBA, people can pick up the game and instantly get a handle on it, undercutting that perceived inaccessibility that some people associate with the genre.

Paragon is taking a similar approach in that it mixes the MOBA with third-person shooter mechanics. However, where Gearbox is being very cautious about referring to *Battleborn* as a MOBA, Epic is doing the opposite, shouting about the game's MOBA credentials from the rooftops. With AI creeps moving down predefined lanes, recharging special abilities and in-match leveling, this is perhaps the purest of

the MOBAs making the transition to console, even if the third-person perspective makes it look a little different.

Regardless of which of these titles more closely resembles the classic MOBA structure, perhaps the most important thing is that they *look* like console titles. Compare their lush 3D graphics and clean UIs to those top-down views of PC MOBAs cluttered with incomprehensible icons, numbers, creeps, spells and explosions, and it's clear that the likes of Gearbox and Epic are making some very sensible decisions when it comes to how to make this genre work on PS4.

But it's not just that MOBA's are making their way onto console; games that fall within that category are starting to influence titles in other genres too. *Overwatch* is a prime example. While it is a first-person shooter at heart, the game has evoked comparisons to MOBAs. That's because it follows the genre in presenting a colourful and diverse roster that clearly distinguishes each character through visual design, personality, and play style.

And when EA eventually gets around to announcing *Titanfall 2*, don't forget that the series' use of AI grunts in multiplayer is clearly a MOBA influence. In that sense, the MOBA genre has had its influence from this generation of console gaming since the beginning. We are just waiting to find out whether the coming of *Battleborn* and *Paragon* on PS4 will herald the moment that it truly stakes a claim as a new staple for the PlayStation player.









△○×□ MOBAs have clear character design – you usually know what a hero's role is on your first glance.

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THE MOBA GLOSSARY

What does all the jargon mean?

LANES

These are the paths that lead between the bases of the two teams where most of the action takes place. It's important to keep these manned, to ensure that the AI creeps and enemies don't make it to your base.

CREEP

AI-controlled minions that are easy to kill and move down paths towards the enemy base. It's important to kill them, not only to protect your base, but also to earn XP you can use to level up your character.

JUNGLER

There are hidden pathways that connect the main lanes. The jungler's role is to stay hidden within those areas, farming monsters that lurk there (these are more powerful than creeps) for experience and buffs.

SUPPORT

Unsurprisingly, supports support the team. The way that they do this depends on the character in question. They could be a healer, buffer, shielder or a character focused on crowd control...

CC

This stands for crowd control, which, in the context of MOBAs, means being annoying to the other team. Stunning enemy players, slowing them and reducing their defence all falls under that umbrella.

LAST-HITTING

If you want to get the benefit from killing creeps, you need to get the last hit. These means you should carefully pick them off once your own creeps have weakened them rather than wading in indiscriminately.

ROTATIONS

Refers to the act of switching lanes. You do this if you perhaps want to push forward on a particular lane, or just want to keep the enemy team on their toes. Make sure you do it in coordination with teammates.

PUSHING

This is when you decide that it's time to push forward towards to the enemy base, which you do by clearing out enemy creeps, whether with a view to end the game or provoke a reaction from the other team.



△○×□ Seemingly dumb creature? Check. Moving on a set path? Check. These must be creeps.



△○×□ While being FPS at its core, *Overwatch* is borrowing MOBA tropes.

THE FUTURE OF THE MOBA

Regardless of whether *Battleborn* or *Paragon* proves to be the first big MOBA on consoles, you have to assume that moment will come at some point, because the genre continues to grow. That's in no small part down to its relationship with another of gaming's new facets: eSports.

The profile of eSports has grown and grown over recent years. Arenas are being filled across the globe, including in the UK, where the *League Of Legends* 2015 World Championship's quarter finals attracted around 12,000 people per day when they took place at SSE Arena, as well as being broadcast live on BBC Three.

eSports players are now being recognised as true sports professionals too, with P-1 visas that are given to professional athletes now being dished out to eSports pros when they travel overseas to participate in competitions.

And what genre is leading the charge in eSports? You guessed it: MOBAs. Fighting games and shooters may get a little more coverage in the gaming press, but the biggest prize pool for an eSport event to date is for *DOTA 2*'s International 5: a staggering $18 million. To put that into context, the winners of the 2015 *Call Of Duty* championships took home $400,000 and the *Ultra Street Fighter IV* Evo 2015 winner, Momochi, $33,000 dollars. Evil Geniuses, the winning team of International 5, took home an eye-watering $6.6 million for its first-place finish.

Those numbers would suggest that the future of the MOBA is pretty assured and with eSports continuing to grow, it seems likely that the genre will grow along with it.

Does that mean that the MOBAs coming to PS4 are going to be as big as *League Of Legends*? Does it even mean that every sceptic is guaranteed to be won over by the likes of *Battleborn* and *Paragon*? Of course not. But it is clear that MOBAs are riding the crest of a colossal wave, and you'd have to imagine that it's going to hit PS4 at some point soon...

★★★★★ TEN OF THE BEST ★★★★★

PS2 WISHLIST

THE TITLES WE WANT TO SEE RETURN AS PART OF THE PS4'S GROWING ROSTER OF PS2 CLASSICS





RIBBIT KING

WE LOVE THE fact that this bizarre golf game where you hit a frog instead of a ball is so wildly unpredictable; it makes it a hell of a lot of fun to play with friends. We're going to keep playing the PS2 version whether Sony brings it to PS4 or not, but if it did, it would be a lot more convenient. Perhaps it could even see the game take its rightful place among other eSports greats...



SILENT HILL 2

WE'VE AVOIDED PUTTING games that have already had an HD remake on this list of PS2 games we want to see included in the roster Sony is gradually adding to PS4, but we've made an exception for this game. The reason? Where other HD remakes offer a superior way of playing the original, *Silent Hill HD Collection* was awful, stripping the games of their atmosphere and, arguably, making them look worse. Just give us the vanilla PS2 (read: best) version of *Silent Hill 2* on PS4 instead.



TIMESPLITTERS 2

IT WOULD BE foolish to say that there will never be another new *TimeSplitters* game in a post-*Shenmue III* world, but it does still seem pretty unlikely. It's a shame, given how much love there is for the excellent shooter series. Sony can easily placate us, though, by adding *TimeSplitters 2* to the PS4's library and letting us get some exciting split-screen couch multiplayer on the go, just like we did back in the day.



ARMORED CORE 2

IT SEEMS THAT if we want to have a mech game on PS4 – and we do, because stomping around in a massive metal frame blowing stuff up is awesome – then the best hope we have right now is Sony digging one out from the vaults. Our vote goes to *Armored Core 2*. It's not aged too badly when it comes to visuals and we maintain that locking on to robots and then firing homing missiles at them will never not be fun.



BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

WE'VE SUNG THE praises of the *Burnout* series plenty of times in this mag, so its no surprise that a *Burnout* game is one the PS2 era games that we've selected for our wishlist of titles we want to join the PS4's other PS2 ports. Already an excellent arcade racer, the addition of the Takedown system made *Burnout* a dream for anyone who loves creating spectacular, chaotic crashes. It's another game series that we'd love to see a sequel to that unfortunately looks like it is on hiatus for the foreseeable future, so a PS4 version would be ideal while we're waiting.



SHADOW HEARTS

THE FIRST THING we like about PS2 RPG *Shadow Hearts* is the setting: we're so used to games set in the future or fantasy versions of medieval times that a game set in an alternate 1913 really stands out. The game also had loads of interesting mechanics, including the ability to create Fusions that allow protagonist Yuri to transform into demons with different abilities, and Malice, which would accumulate as you defeated enemies, eventually leading to the Grim Reaper tracking you down. With all the fuss around *Final Fantasy VII*, it would be nice to remind ourselves that there are other JRPGs out there.



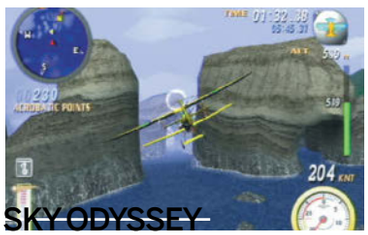
BATTLEFRONT II

SEEING AS THE rebooted *Star Wars Battlefront* didn't quite end up being the game we hoped it would, how about bringing back the much-loved high-point of the series, *Battlefront II*? You're not going to find any *Battlefront II* servers online if you boot the game up on your PS2, so it would be awesome if we could get the game on PS4 along with some dedicated servers to let us jump back. Perhaps the class-based system and the epic space battles that we missed so sorely in the new game might just give the folks at EA some new ideas for a *Battlefront* sequel or expansion?



BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

WHEN YOU HEAR people talking about the great RPGs from the PlayStation 2's past, *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* probably isn't one of them, and that's a shame. Thankfully, you've got us here to tell you about the great PS2 games that are somewhat forgotten. What better way to remind people what a good game this semi-tactical, class-based, hack-and-slash RPG was than to bring it back and let people give it a shot on PS4?



SKY ODYSSEY

ONE OF THE reasons we love the PS2 is because of the diversity of its library. It meant that you got to play games like *Sky Odyssey*, an arcade flight simulator where you had to deal with tight turns, stormy weather and the occasional collapsing canyon as you guided your aircraft through checkpoints. The game also happens to have a brilliant soundtrack composed by Kow Otani, who you might be familiar with for his work on *Shadow Of The Colossus*.



PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

PSYCHIC POWERS ARE cool, so give us *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*. The third-person shooting mechanics weren't all that but that doesn't really matter given that the game focuses on the psychic abilities that you unlock as you progress throughout the game. The most fun of these is probably the telekinetic ability you can use to throw enemies about or to lob crates at your foes. You might also have some fun with the ridiculous plot.

Amplitude

Less talk, more rokk



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Harmonix

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£15.99

PLAYERS
1-4

AGE RATING
12+

TWITTER
@Harmonix

Trophies 17

1 9 5 2

PS4

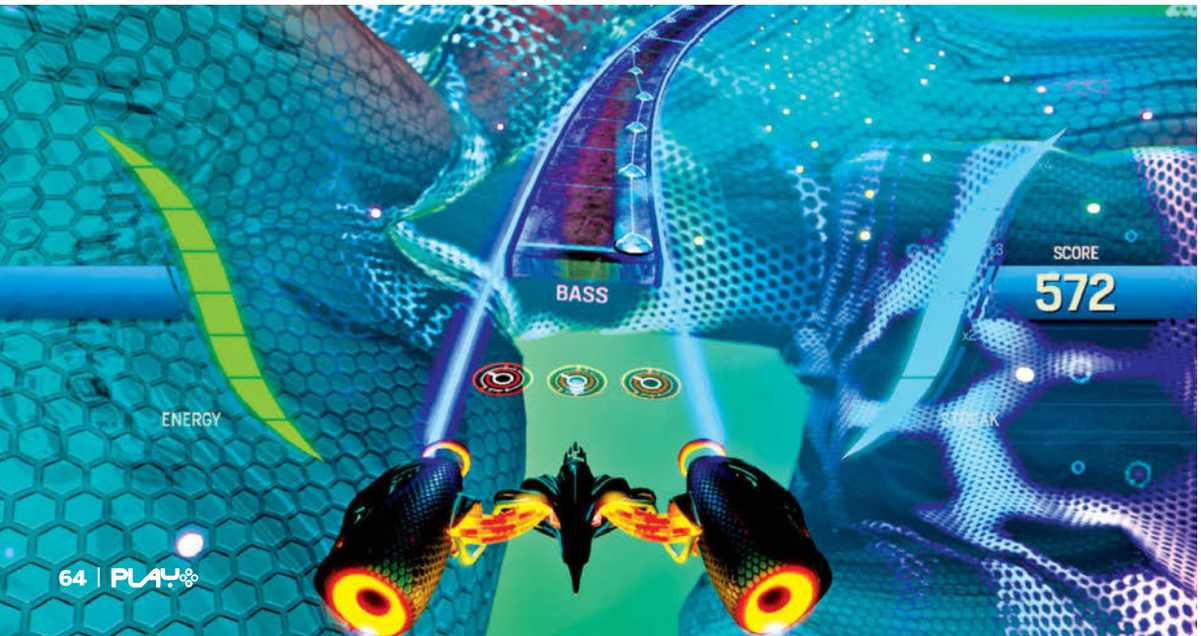
ALSO ON PS3

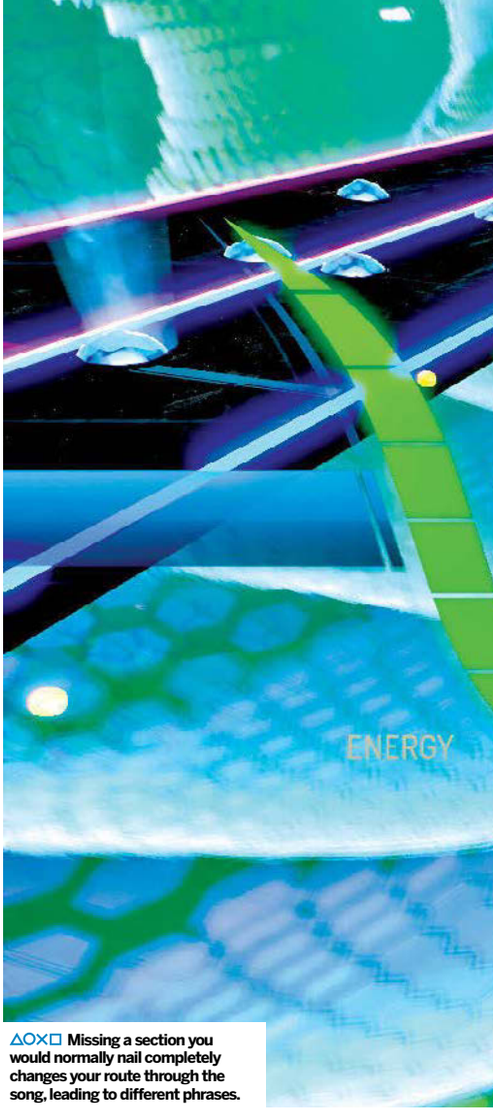
CROWDFUNDING HAS BECOME almost a necessary evil in these expensive times for game development. At its most basic level, it's a pre-order campaign that ensures those who pour their hearts and souls into a game should at least break even on a project that might not otherwise have existed, and if that means we get a reimagining of one of the best games of PS2, who are we to argue? Okay, so *Amplitude* may not have the big-budget backing to score it the killer soundtrack it had back in the day, but the famously musical team has done a frankly incredible job of recreating the same experience even without the likes of Pink, Bowie or Slipknot involved.

Without said star power, the game is left to stand up on its own merits and, given that Harmonix provided much of the awesome itself in the first place, it should come as little surprise that the same sense of occasion is recreated perfectly. Note charts speak for themselves, each impending triplet or track switch easy to read but requiring proper skill to perform – there's not as much life or variety to the backdrops as there once was but when you're hurtling through an Expert track, that'll be the last thing on your mind. It's as stylish and clean as ever, putting functionality first and just happening to look good in the process, and that's the right play.

Amazingly, a few slight changes since the original was released have huge repercussions, in particular the trigger-like R2 button on the DualShock 4. Amplitude's default control scheme maps the three notes per lane to L1, R1 and R2 respectively and while that may have been perfectly fine with the DualShock 2's shoulder buttons, the trigger isn't really fit for purpose at higher level play. There are enough variants (and other controller options – playing on a stick remains awesome) that you'll likely find something that *does* work for you but for returning players, that's going to involve overwriting a decade's worth of muscle memory, so good luck with that.

> "SPATIAL AWARENESS AND PATH-FINDING ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS RHYTHMIC APTITUDE"





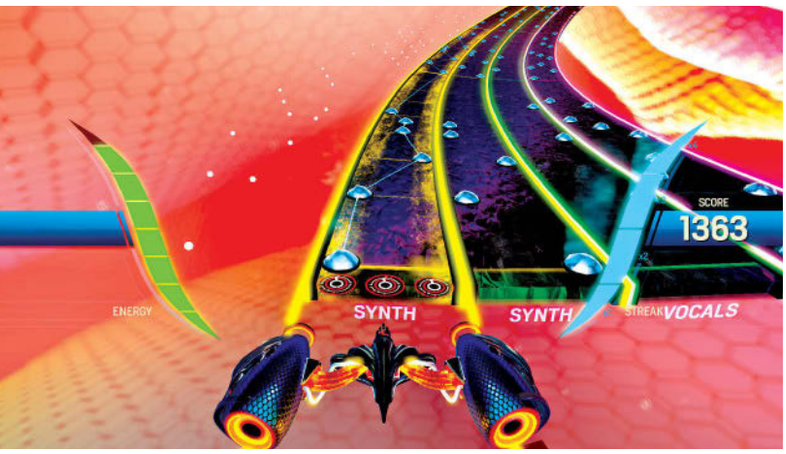
△○×□ **Missing a section you would normally nail completely changes your route through the song, leading to different phrases.**

In terms of the soundtrack, Harmonix describes the 15-song Campaign mode as a playable concept album and we'd struggle to argue with that appraisal. What this means, however, is that there's not all that much room for these tracks to showcase much in the way of genre variety – it's electronica all the way, more in line with *FreQuency*'s OST than *Amplitude*'s, actually. Much like most concept albums, Campaign's songs probably won't click straight away and although we found ourselves in two minds about almost all of the music first time through, a couple more listens and plays saw most of it really grow on us and a few standout tracks emerge. There *is* variety to be found, but it's in the additional tunes unlocked as you play – while far from as broad a musical spectrum as what its PS2 namesake offered, at least these extra tracks are a nod to that diversity. Fan favourites Freezepop turn in an absolute belter with *Phantoms*, while tracks from the *Crypt Of The Necrodancer* and *Transistor* soundtracks play out way better than expected. With 30-odd songs, you'll soon find your own favourites, though the concern is naturally that if you

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△○×□ **Getting three bars is tricky enough but if you play *really* well, you can actually get them to turn gold...**

only end up liking a handful of songs, how long can the game really last?

In truth, the answer is 'a lot longer than you might think', especially if you're willing to journey back to a point in rhythm-action history before song selection simply involved picking tracks that you already know and like. Push yourself beyond the comfort zone that the extensive track lists of games like *Rock Band* have developed within the genre and you'll find all sorts of treats buried in songs you never thought you'd enjoy – taking a different 'path' through tracks as you aim to clear each lane in sequence can turn up some satisfying patterns that you may not have encountered on earlier plays, so it's always worth going back to even those songs that you really didn't get on with to see what you can find.

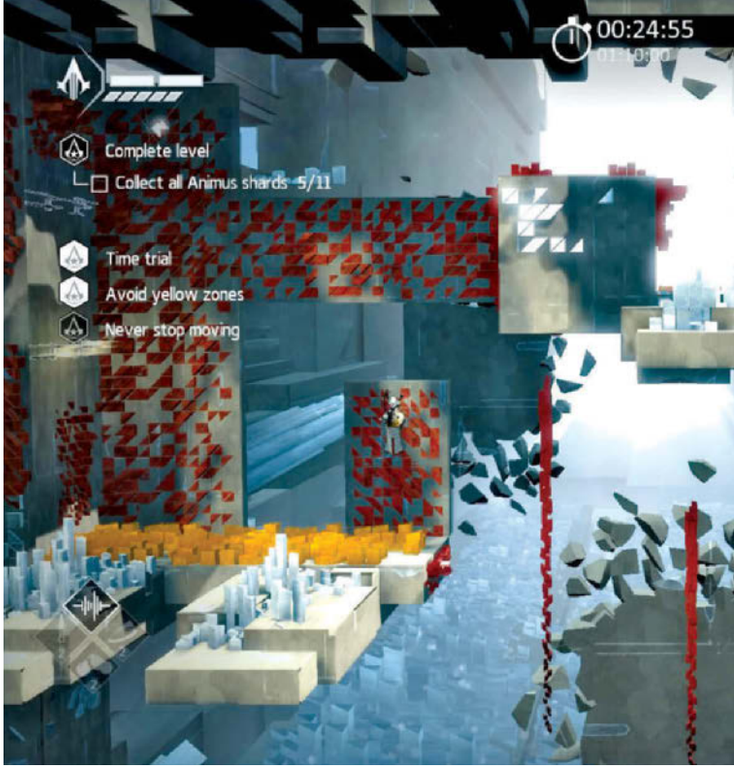
The fact that this not only leverages an old-school brand but also returns to old-school sensibilities in terms of replay value coming through self-improvement (and longevity relying heavily on your willingness to hit the Retry button to play the same songs on loop) means that as good as it is, *Amplitude* will be quite the culture shock for anyone who has only recently developed a fondness for music games. It requires a different attitude to games with vast song catalogues, a different skill set to simply picking an instrument and sticking with it and a different kind of gaming ability, where spatial awareness and path-finding are just as important as rhythmic aptitude. You will be challenged in ways the genre hasn't really managed in over a decade and while it might feel lacking in content compared to its modern musical peers, acceptance of its unique flavour of rhythm-action and the demands it places on players reveals a quality game that will keep score-chasers busy for months with its brutal difficulty and compelling leaderboard-fuelled competitive scene.

Luke Albigés

VERDICT

A fitting tribute to the PS2 classic, albeit one that will struggle to hold the attention of those without solid rhythm action skills or fond memories of the original.

8
PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Amplitude
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India

Just bring back Prince Of Persia already...

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft
DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Montreal & Climax Studios
PSN PRICE
£7.99
PLAYERS
1
INSTALL SIZE
3.6 GB
AGE RATING
16+
TWITTER
@assassinscreed

Trophies 18

0	0	3	15

PS4

ALSO COMING TO VITA

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS, a princess in a tower and a mysterious, and potentially powerful, piece of treasure... *Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India* has all the trappings of a classic fairytale. Add to that the gorgeous scenery and an intrepid protagonist and you've got all the makings of a magically atmospheric game. But don't let the beautiful visuals cast a veil (or should we say pull a peaked hood?) over your eyes and distract you from the gameplay itself.

This is the second game in the 2.5D *Assassin's Creed Chronicles* series – the first being *China* released in April last year – but we wouldn't go as far as to say that *Chronicles: India* is a sequel. The span of a continent and a few centuries separate Shao Jun of *China* and Arbaaz Mir of *India*, though their stories are linked by your typical *Assassin's Creed* MacGuffin, bringing into the story our Templar antagonists and the inevitable Precursor spiel to remind us that there's a 'real world' outside the Animus.

It is certainly worth mentioning that Arbaaz is Muslim, adding to the diversification of Ubisoft's usually 'safe' (read: white) playable characters. But then again, it is also worth noting that Ubisoft tends to diversify outside of the main series now and then as with *Liberation* and *Chronicles: China*.

Chronicles: India tells the story of Arbaaz Mir during a time of great upheaval in India, when the Sikh Empire warred with the East India Company. Arbaaz, bold stealer of the Koh-I-Noor diamond (a potential Precursor object), likes to break into the Maharajah's fortresses to liase with his lover, Princess Pyara. But when his mentor, Hamid, is kidnapped by Templars and the Koh-I-Noor stolen, Arbaaz must save Hamid and reclaim the mysterious MacGuffin before the Templars employ it to do something that is no doubt very evil and bad.

> "THE TRANSITION BETWEEN THE LAYERS OF EACH LEVEL IS SMOOTH AND ELEGANT"

The game presents you with three different styles of play to aim for in every level, each of which have either Bronze, Silver and Gold ratings. These are Shadow (for the stealth aficionado), Silencer (for those that employ non-lethal takedowns) and Assassin (for stone cold killers). However, this is but the illusion of choice. *Chronicles: India* has already decided that the best way for the game to be traversed is with stealth and stealth only. But how is strangling a guard and hiding his unconscious body without being noticed *not* stealthy? And if, like us, you sometimes found some of levels unnecessarily tricky and repetitive and decide to drop all pretence of stealth and make a mad dash for it, make no mistake, you will be hampered by the gameplay. It is nigh impossible to overcome multiple enemies. All it takes is a few stray bullets and then your pitiful health bar is thoroughly depleted. And once you've engaged an enemy or two in combat, don't go thinking that you'll be able to leg it round a corner and jump into the nearest pile of petals, *India*'s version of the hay bale – almost nowhere is safe once you have been detected. You may as well let yourself be killed so



△○×□ **As ever, convenient ziplines and handholds are bountiful. Someone call city management.**

OR YOU COULD TRY

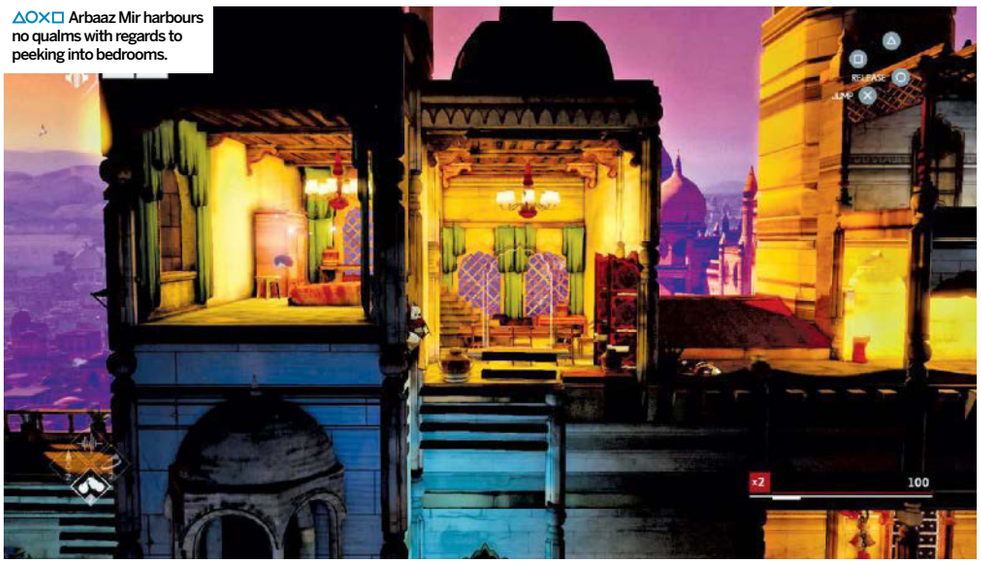
STEALTH INC ULTIMATE EDITION No weapons. Just one little clone with a pair of goggles creeping through a facility past robots. Sneakiness at its purest.

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△○×□ Arbaaz Mir harbours no qualms with regards to peeking into bedrooms.

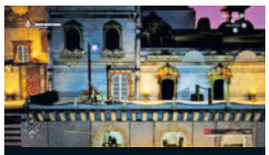


you can restart from the checkpoint. Nonetheless, there's still a lot of pleasure to be had when performing an undetected assassination. The free-run, slide and then slice assassination is a particularly fun takedown method. Stealth is a great mechanic, but it eventually becomes exasperating and monotonous.

If you're yet to play *Chronicles: China* then you are probably yet to encounter 2.5D game stages, the likes of which you'll find in all three *Chronicles* games. The free-running mechanic is smooth; you won't find yourself accidentally running up walls any more. The transition between the layers of each level is smooth and elegant and you'll find no loading screen here. Ziplining from a fortress tower to a palace garden also serves to show off the vivid visuals.

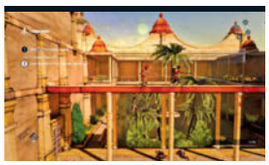
Disappointingly, it feels like *Chronicles: India* is employing style over substance. Put aesthetics out of your mind and all you're left with is a trope-filled narrative and repetitive gameplay which can only provide you with so many hours of entertainment. Sadly, there's no fairytale happy ending here.

Hannah Westlake



TROPHY CABINET

CONSISTENT COMBO
Achieve a Gold rating in your chosen Style Grade (Shadow, Silencer or Assassin) and make sure to hold that Gold ranking for two more sections of the game.



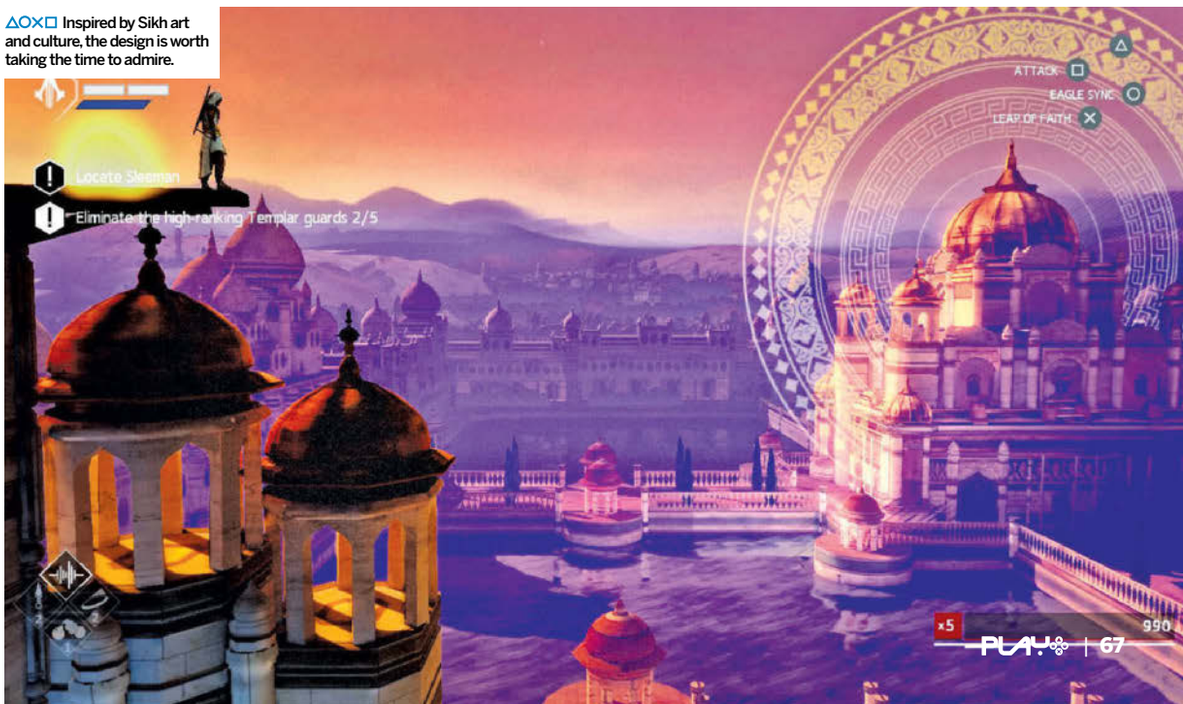
A SPEEDY RESCUE
You'll need to employ every weapon in your arsenal and avoid drawn-out combat to make it to mentor Hamid in time, thus netting you this easy Bronze Trophy.







△○×□ Inspired by Sikh art and culture, the design is worth taking the time to admire.



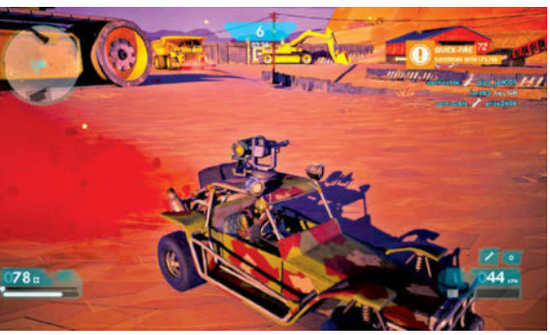
VERDICT

Sumptuous visuals disguise a somewhat lacking and repetitive game, but it's still worth the time for fans of 2.5 side-scrollers and the *Assassin's Creed* series in general.

6

PlayMag_UK scored **6** for
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



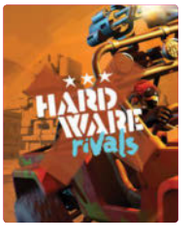


△○✕□ Aiming is possible on the right stick, but pretty much only horizontally.



Hardware: Rivals

Twisted Metal Slack



DETAILS

PUBLISHER Sony

DEVELOPER In-house

PSN PRICE £16.99

PLAYERS 1-10

INSTALL SIZE 6.68 GB

AGE RATING 7+

TWITTER @playstation

Trophies 42

1 4 8 29

PS4

IF 2014'S PLAYSTATION Plus output offered a smattering of glory amongst a sea of mediocrity (*Velocity 2X*, *Don't Starve*), 2015 was all about one game. The mighty *Rocket League* came from pretty much nowhere and captured the hearts, minds and thumbs of a legion of players for the whole summer, turning itself from indie breakout hit to global eSport in a matter of weeks.

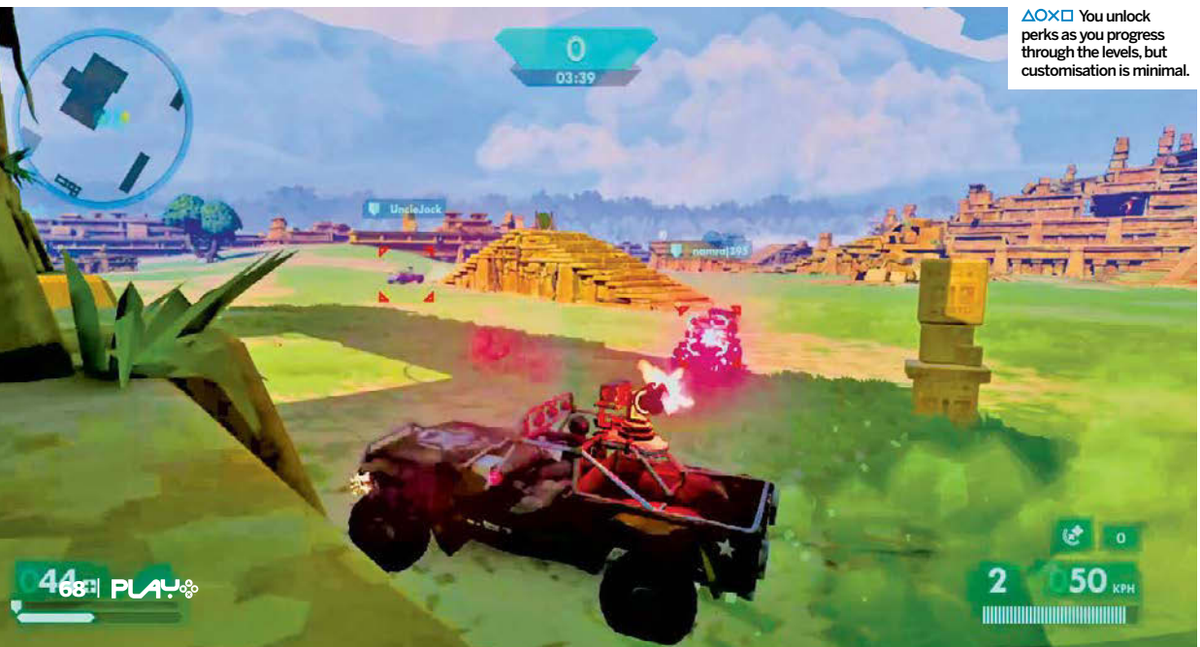
Given *Rocket League*'s success, then, the *Unreal Engine 4*-powered, Sony in-house-developed *Hardware: Rivals* comes with some serious expectations. Surely this is going to be the next big 'free' game, the kickstart to a new year we all need while we tick off our *Fallout 4* to-do lists and patiently wait for Drake to come back (no, not the Puffa jacket one dancing in the weird box).

What a disappointment then, that *Hardware: Rivals* is so numbingly bland. This is a vehicular combat game that pits trucks and tanks against one another in any combination across large, featureless expanses of land, where they pitter-patter at each other with weak machine gun fire and blast each other into geometrical detritus with power-weapons. And that is it.

> "IT'S HARD TO LOOK FOR DEPTH WHEN THERE'S NO-ONE TO PLAY WITH"

Nothing wrong with simplicity, of course, but if you're not going to innovate on an old formula, then you need to get the fundamentals so tight that merely existing in the game world is a riot. *Hardware: Rivals* is not a riot. Vehicles handle clumsily, with leaden handling and gigantic turning circles, little physical feedback in the hand and about as much nuance as a *Big Brother* contestant.

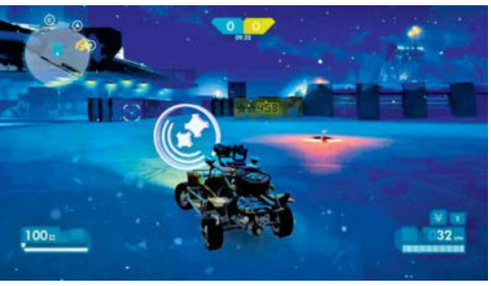
Combat doesn't fare much better, either. The primary weapons of each of the four available vehicles do barely any damage whatsoever – so games are decided by who can control the power-up icons on the map, be they armour and health, or, more importantly, heavy weapons. That's a decent set-up for a multiplayer game, and a nice throwback to a bygone era, but the balance is way off. Some of the weapons on the map



△○✕□ You unlock perks as you progress through the levels, but customisation is minimal.





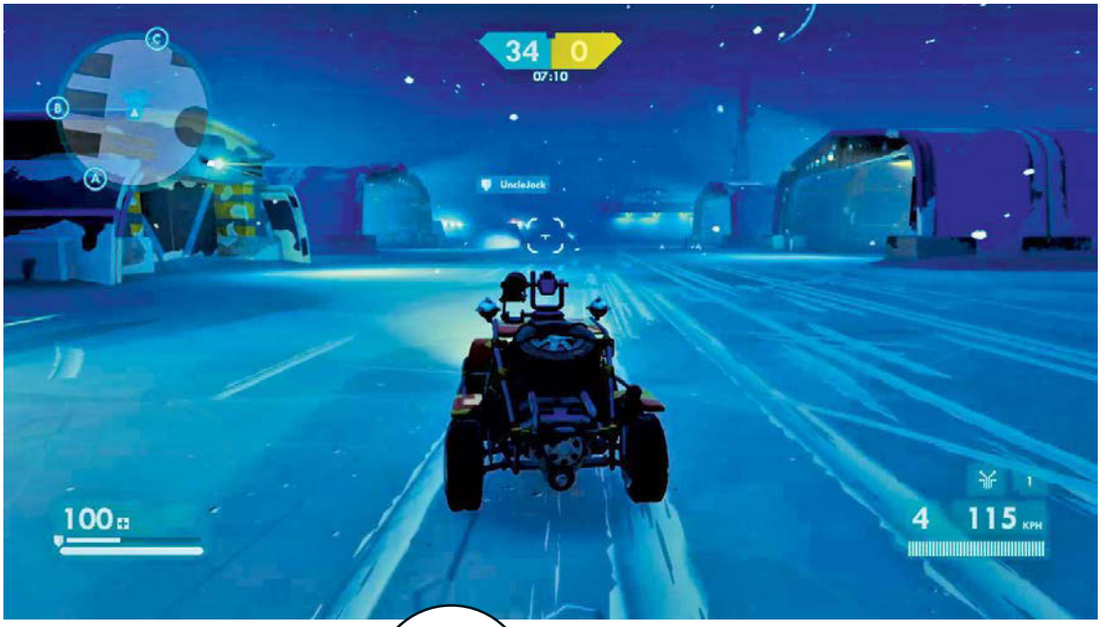






△○×□ Maps are bland. This one features a boring pyramid.





are instant kills, so it's just a race to pick them up as soon as possible.

Perhaps this could lead to some sort of tactical standoff the longer players have to get to grips with the game's maps and modes, but it's hard to look for depth when there's no-one to play with. There must be something up with matchmaking, as we have still yet to see a full game (and remember, it's only five-on-five), and more often than not, you're thrown into a completely empty game in the hope someone will eventually join you.

Considering how many millions of PS4 owners are out there and the fact the game is essentially free, its hard to believe that there aren't ten people looking to waste a few minutes carting vehicles around and shooting at one another. Online games live and die by their first few days, and *Hardware: Rivals* is not one many people are going to stick around for.

Yet, despite all this (lack of players aside, for now), *Hardware: Rivals* is not a bad game. It looks fairly nice and sharp, has a super smooth frame-rate, and everything works. It's fun to blow up other vehicles, when you do manage to get more than three players on a server it can be fairly frenetic, and it doesn't seem to have any disconnection issues. And that's just about it.

In a world where time is at a premium and the level of content available on PS4 is so high, *Hardware: Rivals* will be little more than a forgotten footnote. *Rocket League*, a new challenger has not arrived.

Jon Denton

VERDICT

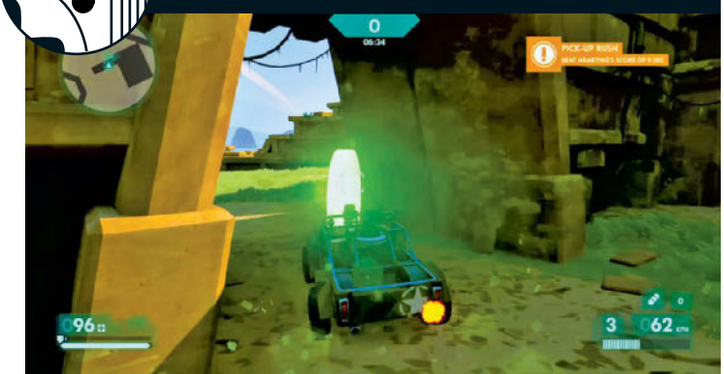
Amazingly bland and perfunctory vehicular action, with seemingly no-one online to play with. Instantly forgettable. Our advice: just keep playing *Rocket League*.

5 PlayMag_UK scored **5** for Hardware: Rivals

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

SHARE

PLAY CHALLENGE



SHARE THESE FEATS, IF YOU CAN...



MAJOR LASER

△ **DOMINATE THE POWER** weapons on the map to win. And if you find a laser, never let anyone else touch it. Boom-land.

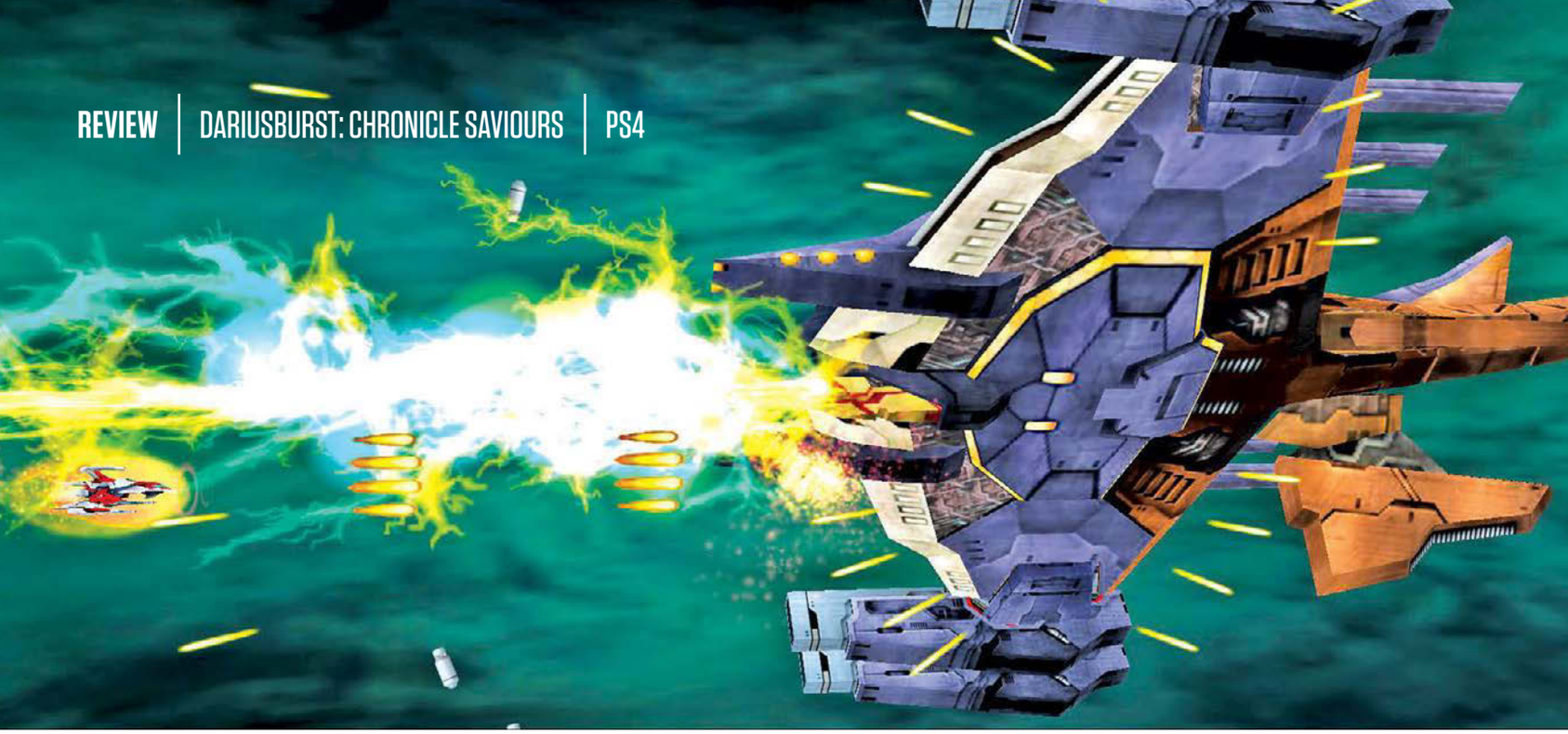


SO LONELY

□ **FINDING A FULL** match on *Hardware: Rivals* is harder than going on a ten-kill streak. Where is everybody?

Beaten our trials? Let us know @PlayMag_UK!

IN THIS SERIES △ **HARDWARE ONLINE ARENA** One of the original online games on PS2, this was exciting purely because you could actually battle other people online.



DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours

There's nothing fishy about this new shoot-'em-up



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Degica

DEVELOPER
Pyramid, Chara-ani

RELEASE DATE
Out now

PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1-4

INSTALL SIZE
1.7 GB

AGE RATING
7+

TWITTER
@DariusburstCS

Trophies 32



PS4

ALSO ON VITA

YOU CAN COUNT the fantastic traditional PS4 shoot-'em-ups on one finger – *Resogun*. Realising there's a gap in the market publisher Degica has delived unto PS4 a *massive* shooter. Sadly, though, it comes with an equally massive price tag.

For those unaware, *Chronicle Saviours* is the latest addition to the 30-year-old *Darius* franchise and is actually two games in one, which may explain its eye-watering price tag. In addition to including a port of *DariusBurst Another Chronicle* (along with Chronicle Mode which features over 3,000 levels), it also includes a brand new way to play in CS Mode.

Mechanically, both games are similar, with success and failure depending on your mastery of the rather nifty Burst Unit, a useful rechargeable laser cannon that has a variety of different uses. It can be used to unleash a steady burst of concentrated fire, or detached as a separate laser, which you can also angle to act as a shield. It can even be used to create a counter-burst against certain boss attacks, although this requires careful timing.

Power-ups are similar to previous *Darius* games, meaning they revolve around three distinct colours. Red orbs power your laser, blue orbs improve missiles while green enhances your shield. Handily, the laser upgrades through three different types (Missile, Laser and Wave) and it's possible to destroy bullets of the same colour. In addition to upgradable weapons, you can also reverse the direction of your ship so you can fire behind you. This is essential as you're constantly attacked from both sides by a variety of dangerous mechanical aquatic-looking enemies. Although the gameplay of *DariusBurst* is fairly traditional, the new Burst Unit throws a surprising amount of strategy into the game, particularly as you can recharge it by destroying enemies and objects. Time it right and a charge can last ages, allowing you to quickly take down the game's gargantuan bosses.

> "THINK VERY, VERY CAREFULLY ABOUT PARTING WITH YOUR CASH"

Bosses have always been a big part of the *Darius* series and they're equally impressive here. Huge crabs, heavily armoured puffer fish and gigantic carapaced turtles are but a few of the imposing bosses you face and many of them have devious attack patterns that will take a few lives to master. Some are tougher than others (Hungry Gluttons can get in the sea, for example, although they'd probably like that) but for the most part they're well balanced and highly entertaining to fight against.

In addition to the large number of bosses, *DariusBurst* also features nine different ships. Running the gamut of the *Darius* franchise, they all offer varying abilities for a large number of different playing styles. While they're all available immediately in AC mode, you're unable to access them in CS mode until you've acquired a specific amount of points. Needless to say, CS mode features a fair amount of grinding if you want to unlock and use the best craft.

The most impressive aspect of *DariusBurst* is just how much content it offers. It will take an age to master the 12 stages of AC and then AC EX offers 12 more, which are more bullet-hell in their design. And then there's the insanely huge Chronicle Mode that requires you

IN THIS SERIES

DARIUSBURST This was first released for the PSP in 2009, exclusively in Japan. It was superseded by *Another Chronicle* and *Another Chronicle EX*, which are both included here.





to complete over 3,000 mission-based remixed stages. Interestingly, you team up in different 'arcades' here so that you all collectively beat and unlock stages together online. It's also possible to play with up to three other players locally on PS4, which makes things far more manageable. It's worth noting though that all the modes based on the arcade game feature the original aspect ratio, meaning you play in letterbox to replicate the original dual monitor experience.

CS mode presents you with a further 200+ plus stages to master, but thankfully uses the full screen (a godsend for those that pick up the Vita version). It also has the aforementioned point-based unlocks, for not only buying ships, but also for arming those you have already purchased. It's worth the grind, though, as it features a plethora of new bosses, enemies, and music (all of which is incredible) which will delight *Darius* fans.

Even if you've never played a *Darius* game before, it's hard to not be impressed with the sheer amount of game to be found here. It's annoying, then, that there's no Cross Buy and the price is simply extortionate for such a niche genre. Think very, very carefully about parting with your cash, but if you do, you'll find a *lot* of content for your money in one of the PS4's best shooters.

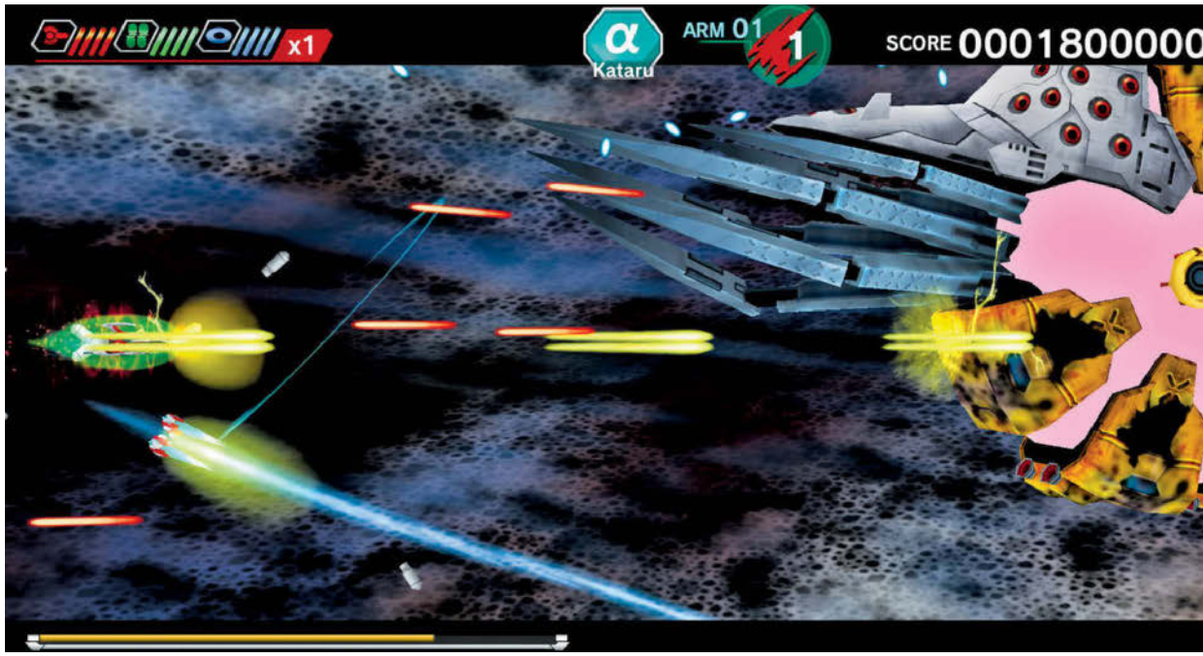
Darran Jones

VERDICT

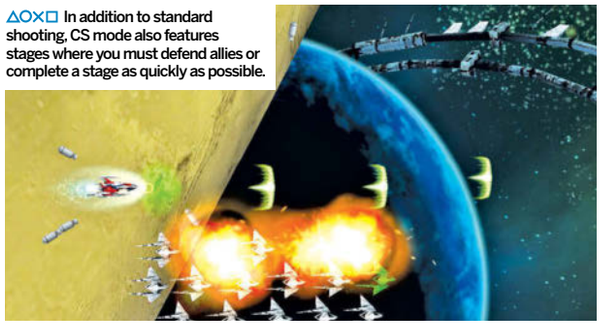
Yes it's expensive, but it's also a beautifully presented shooter with deep gameplay mechanics, satisfying boss encounters and excellent level design.

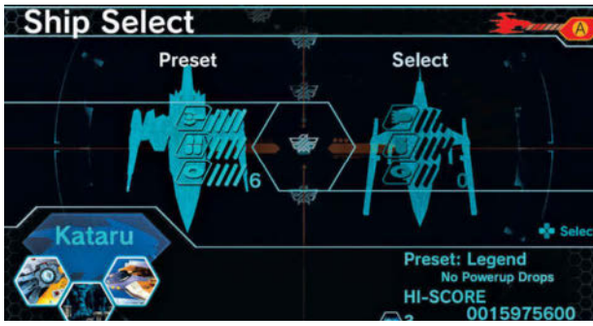
8 PlayMag_UK scored **8** for DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



△○×□ **In addition to standard shooting, CS mode also features stages where you must defend allies or complete a stage as quickly as possible.**





PS VITA: THE DIFFERENCES

Hope you've got good eyesight...



VISUAL IMPROVEMENTS
The small screen ensures that the bosses look even more impressive than they do on PS4.

CROSS-SAVE
Cross-saving is handy, particularly as you'll need friends to complete some of *Chronicles*' missions.

NO MULTIPLAYER
This is a huge blow, which makes some of the stages incredibly hard to finish on your own.

SMALL SCREEN
Although the Vita version is perfectly playable in AC mode, reading text is a real pain.



"EACH HELPFUL PERK OR LUCKY WEAPON DROP SCREAMS 'THIS IS THE RUN!' IN YOUR EAR WHILE COMMON SENSE GIVES YOU A DISAPPOINTED LOOK"

Nuclear Throne

No amount of RadAway is saving these guys...



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Vlambeer

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£7.99

PLAYERS
1-2

AGE RATING
12+

TWITTER
@Vlambeer

Trophies 45

1 3 10 31

PS4

ALSO ON VITA

THE END OF the world has been portrayed in all kinds of ways in gaming over the years. *Fallout*'s suitably bleak browndemic is perhaps the most obvious one to cite, although the beautiful naturally reclaimed world of *Enslaved* and the intense savagery of *every zombie game ever* are also right up there. But seen through the eyes of Vlambeer – the studio behind the likes of *Ridiculous Fishing* and *Luftrausers* – the apocalypse seems to have been met with a little more of a sense of humour and whimsy than we're typically used to. And that's just the first of many stings, because before you've even finished giggling at the fact that you're playing a bipedal pistol-totting fish who can roll (for some reason), you're already dead.

So yeah, *Nuclear Throne* is an obscenely difficult game. Even if it weren't for the fact that its randomly generated wastelands presented new enemy patterns and elite placements every time you play, it'd still be tough. Even if equipment wasn't divvied out by the RNG gods, it'd still be tough. And even if you could choose your own upgrade path rather than relying on a selection of four perks each time you mutate (read: level up), it'd *still* be tough. Combine all of those factors, though, and it should be clear that this is not a game for the faint-hearted – runs can be over in literally seconds and in order to have even the vaguest chance of reaching the titular grand chair, you're almost certainly going to need a little luck on your side.

That said, Vlambeer's latest oddity does a sterling job of making you believe that you might actually stand a chance against the odds that are overwhelmingly stacked against you on any given run, each helpful perk or lucky weapon drop screaming 'THIS IS THE RUN!' in your ear while common sense gives you a disappointed look and shakes its head as you grow giddy with overconfidence. And then blow it a screen later. That the task at hand so often feels like it might be possible speaks volumes of how empowering the game's twin-stick shooter combat is, although the fact that this feeling is so often grossly misleading means this gruelling experience certainly won't be one that everyone will be able to enjoy.

You start with a meagre band of three freaks huddled around a camp fire – the aforementioned rolling fish, an eye-covered telekinetic blob and a staunchly defensive crystal shard – but the more you play and the further you get, the more characters will become available. Each has their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as a unique power mapped to L2. There's no right or wrong choice, whether you decide to rock the speedy Plant with its enemy-trapping snare ability, the hardy Crystal with its on-demand shield, the hungry Robot who eats weapons as often as he fires them or whoever else you land on. It's surprisingly well balanced for a roguelike and with the exception of Melting – a pros-only character who pretty much dies in one hit – you're just as likely to have a decent run with one of the misfits as any of the others.





△○×□ Make it this far and you're doing pretty well, but you'll need to clear the whole game to unlock the very best loot...



△○×□ Robot's ability to devour weapons to recover health or ammo allows for some clutch run saves.

As much as the layouts of stages may change, the fact that you still need to play the same areas in the same order – just as in *The Binding Of Isaac* – can put something of a downer on extended sessions. You'll most likely quickly tire of the starting desert area and long for the random generation to stretch further than simply sculpting basic mazes from the same tile sets each round, but that's a wider criticism of the roguelike formula in general rather than one of *Nuclear Throne* itself. The rules are very simple – if you want to see more, you have to do better. Shortcuts, warps and secret areas exist to help keep your stay in the early zones to an absolute minimum, but good luck stumbling upon any of them without the help of a guide or just a stroke of blind luck.

At a cursory glance, then, it can seem like *Nuclear Throne*'s fixed perks, paths and arsenal make it fall short of the gloriously grotesque synergy and variety of Isaac's twisted power-ups. But the more you fail to reach the special chair in question (seriously, that thing had better be *damn* comfy...), the more it emerges that Vlambeer's effort isn't worse, merely *different*. As you learn to love each character's starting power – well, not all of them... poor Fish and its near-pointless roll – and to manipulate loot drops to get a better chance at landing the gear you enjoy using, the dual weapon system starts to be rewarding in its strict limitation. The further your journey takes you, the more weird and wonderful weapons you'll find and the tougher it becomes to juggle just two at a time. Depending on your character and play-style, you'll soon learn which combinations work best – a heavy machine gun for dealing with large packs at range and a melee weapons for deflecting bullets or saving ammo, for instance, or a shotty and a grenade launcher to get the job done quick. Once you figure out the earliest opportunity to get the good stuff, skipping a few weapon chests just before that stage has a chance to spawn additional loot, offering a slightly better shot at the arsenal you need to go about (once again just falling short of) making it to your chair-shaped goal.

You'll get angry with *Nuclear Throne*, for sure. You'll curse each maggot or rat that sneaks through scenery to land a cheap shot, flip out when RNG throws you into a run-ending open room full of snipers, and roll your eyes when a stray bullet catches an abandoned car and you're killed in the blast when the coast looked clear. But you'll jump straight back in, and you'll suffer all over again. Runs are usually so short that the compulsion to hit 'Retry' and bang your head against this nuclear nightmare on loop is just too hard to resist...

Luke Albigés

VERDICT

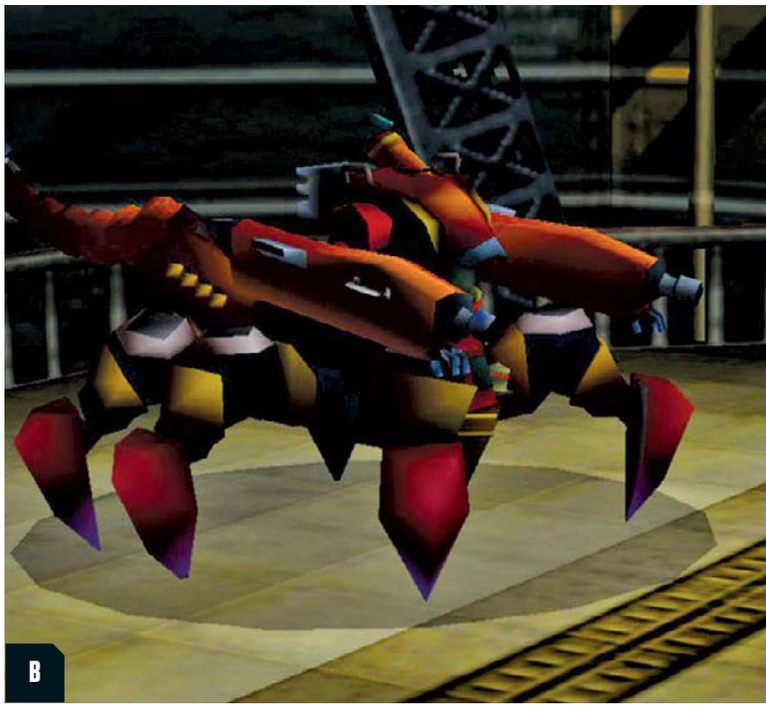
Cruel and unforgiving yet wonderfully satisfying when it all comes together, *Nuclear Throne* is an accomplished roguelike capable of challenging even the most skilled players.

8

PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Nuclear Throne

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

REVIEW ROUND-UP


B

KING'S QUEST CONTINUES to be a game that surprises us. When the first chapter released, we were expecting a lazy cash-in on the *King's Quest* licence, but what we got was a generous and enjoyable first entry to the adventure series that we praised for being full of character. That set expectations far higher for **KING'S QUEST CHAPTER II: RUBBLE WITHOUT A CAUSE [A]**. Unfortunately, we've been surprised for a second time by an episode that falls far short of the quality benchmark set by its predecessor. After successfully becoming King in the last outing, this chapter sees you kidnapped by goblins, along with a number of citizens from the kingdom of Daventry that you met during the game's debut. This means you're confined to a network of caves that you spend the duration of the episode trying to stage an escape from. Unsurprisingly, that subterranean environment lacks the variety, colour, and interest of a world that was drawn with such painterly flair in *Chapter I*. More problematic than that, however, is the fact that the game's puzzles just aren't well designed. Frustration with obtuse puzzles is compounded by the chapter's repetitive structure. You return to your cell at the end of each day when there are no more tasks you can complete. But have you completed all the tasks that are possible? Or have you missed something that's going to come back to bite you if you choose to get back in your cell and hit the hay? Trying to answer that question leads to a lot of wasted time wandering around. Indeed, this whole chapter feels like it's killing time rather than progressing the overarching story, so 'wasted time wandering around' is a rather apt description of the chapter at large.

> "THIS WHOLE CHAPTER FEELS LIKE IT'S KILLING TIME RATHER THAN PROGRESSING THE OVERARCHING STORY"


A

△○×□ The devious merchant is one of many returning characters.

From a game that consistently confounds our expectations, we move on to one that offers no surprises. We are talking about the PS4 release of **FINAL FANTASY VII [B]**. There's nothing revelatory that we can tell you about a game that's been available to play in various different forms for nearly 20 years. It has all the brilliance that we associate with the original, along with its faults and foibles. In other words: it's *Final Fantasy VII*. Having said that, it's worth mentioning that there are a couple of welcome changes that make this a preferred choice over the PlayStation Classics versions of the game. Along with a slight upgrade to the visuals, this version supports analogue sticks and allows you to turn off random encounters if you fancy exploring without the hassle of being pulled into unwanted battles. Is it worth it if you've *already* got the Classics version?



△○×□ Just let that sweet nostalgia wash right over you...

Probably not. If you don't own it, then it's an ideal way of playing the game in anticipation of the remake that we'll be waiting to play for some time.

GUNS, GORE & CANNOLI [C] is a simple game with a simple concept. You play as a Mafia enforcer who has been given a job to do that's made a little more difficult thanks to a pesky zombie outbreak. You push through those difficulties by shooting them. There's not much more to the game than that, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Punching through hordes of zombies with an array of weapons is fun, if a little mindless. You're encouraged to frequently switch between the various guns in your arsenal to deal with different situations, which can be a little fiddly due to the fact that you have to cycle between weapons, rather than having access to some kind of weapon wheel, but we appreciate the effort to get you playing with all the tools at your disposal. The game is certainly not going to blow any of you away, but it is a competent 2D shooter that you can get some enjoyment out of if you're just looking for a game where you can switch you brain off for a while and shoot things. With local co-op support, you can take a friend along for the ride, too.

Speaking of games that don't require a whole lot of brainpower, our next game





is **FAT PRINCESS ADVENTURES [D]**. This is a simple hack-and-slash where you choose to play as a Warrior, Archer, Mage, or Engineer, and then set off to bash goblins alone, or with up to three other players. There's not a whole lot of depth to combat, which pretty much consists of mashing a couple of attack buttons and throwing in the odd special attack. As with *Guns, Gore & Cannoli*, this simplicity doesn't necessarily work against it, making it an accessible game that anyway can enjoy. Having said that, the game's bosses do require a little bit more thought. As an example, there's one where you have to pick up chickens and put them in a wheel to electrify a floor. You then have to get the boss to run over that floor to make it vulnerable and allow you to attack. Not only are these light-puzzle-based battles far more



△○×□ Bring a full party of friends along to get the best out of this colourful title.



interesting that a bullet-sponge boss, they open up the potential for teamwork, which makes sense, given that this game is best played with others. The ability to upgrade your characters' weapons and armour also offers a way to add a little intrigue to what might otherwise be an overly basic combat system, allowing you to swap out weapons with different properties and make them more powerful as you progress through the game. None of this changes the fact that 'mashing a couple of attack buttons' pretty much covers what you can expect from *Fat Princess Adventures*. But, you know what? That's fine, because we kind of enjoyed playing it.

△○×□ This bloody scene pretty much sums up *Guns, Gore & Cannoli*.





PLAYSTATION CLASSICS #22

PUBLISHER GT INTERACTIVE | **DEVELOPER** ODDWORLD INHABITANTS | **FORMAT** PSONE

RELEASE DATE 19 SEPTEMBER 1998 | **PLAY SCORE** 86% | **METACRITIC SCORE** N/A

The Making Of... ABE'S ODDYSEE

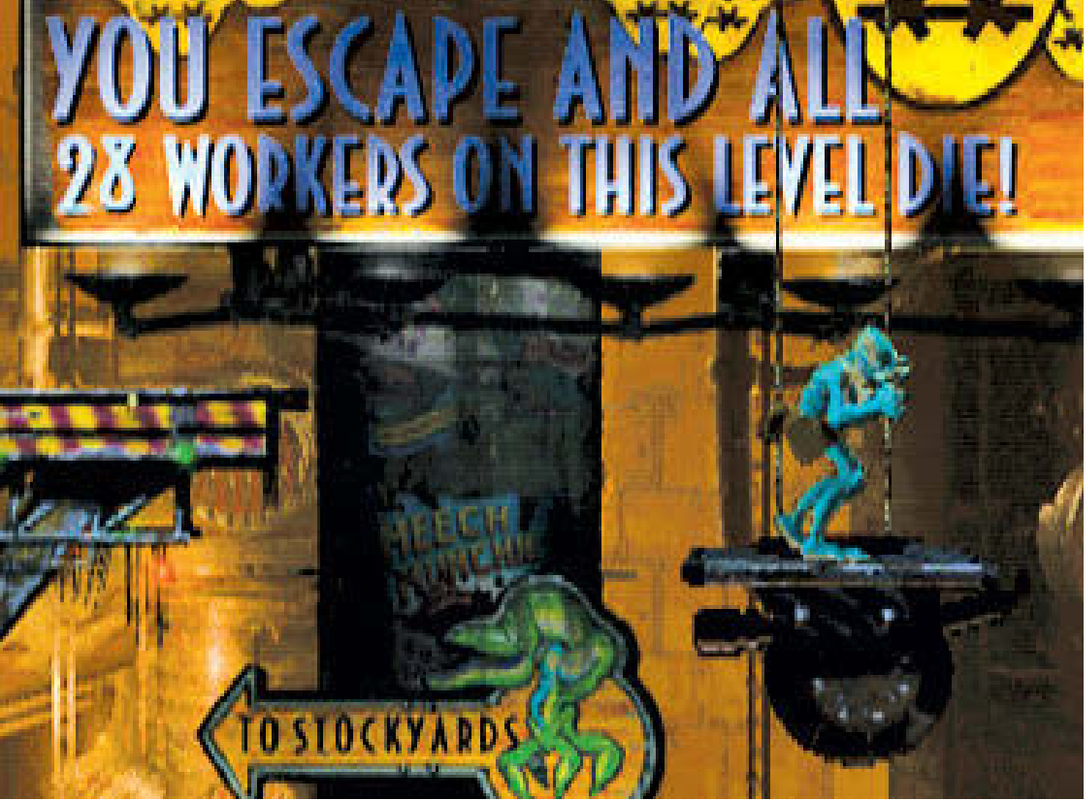
The oddest protagonist in platform gaming was designed in an endeavour to make us care about pixels in a way no other game had. In making Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee, creator Lanning Lanning looked to the past to carve out a future...



"EARLY GAME DESIGNERS WILL TELL YOU STORY WAS NEVER THEIR GOAL, IT'S HOW YOU GOT TO THAT GOAL THAT WAS IMPORTANT"

Oddworld Inhabitants' first game was a strange concoction. A game that was, in turns: base, childish, immature, nostalgic, meaningful, clever and stunning. Much like its protagonist, it was an unlikely hero for the people and the ideas it represented, and yet it managed this feat flawlessly. It was released in 1997 rather quietly (not by design) and though its presence lingers on, like many revered games from yesteryear (*Contra*, *Super Mario 64*, et al), it is more surprising than not to discover a fellow fan. And yet the game and the name of its creators still command huge levels of respect and adoration: in *Rolling Stone* magazine's 'A-Z of Cult' the *Oddworld* universe was its 'Letter O', the only videogame franchise on the list. It's somewhat of a double-edged sword, admitting that *Abe's Oddysee* has a fanatic, if smaller, fanbase, but it proves that while Abe is a rare sight among gaming's greats, he thoroughly deserves to be there.

The game began in the mind of Oddworld Inhabitants founder Lorne Lanning as a means to connect with a character in a videogame. "Early game designers will tell you story was never their goal, it's how you got to that goal that was important. I started by thinking about it more as a living life form, so I started with a script," he says. From there, he explains he began to think about how best to tell this story, in what format and in what presentational style. "I had been thinking about Abe for a long time. I had lots of notes and stories about him and I knew that I wanted to make a side-scrolling platforming game because those were the ones that made me feel connected to the character." He explained his





△○×□ Bees were an unlikely but deadly foe in the wilderness.



reasoning further, citing *Flashback* and the original *Prince Of Persia* as progenitors to the feeling he describes as being the protagonist's "guardian angel", rather than playing as them from a first-person viewpoint or watching over their shoulder in third-person. The side-on view tasked the player with the responsibility of knowing what dangers were lurking around Abe and figuring out how best to tackle them. Lanning highlights that this kind of responsibility made an impact on you, the player, when the character died in a way that could never be reproduced in any other format.

But Lanning is also keen to point out that connection didn't just come from the character's death. Abe was colourful and idiotic, endearingly so. When you tried to throw something when you'd run out of projectiles Abe would look to the screen and shrug, making a noise that suggests, 'No can do, buddy'. He could fart, and then laugh at his own flatulence and when Abe hit a wall he tumbled over and snarled as he rose, angry that you allowed it to happen. Then, of course, there was Gamespeak, a mechanic that allowed you to interact with the residents of Oddworld. Enabling you to talk to your fellow Mudokons and guide them to safety produced the dual benefit of creating a simple yet deep game mechanic while also helping you to connect with those poor souls – your guardian angel role extended to Abe's burdened brothers, since their fate was also in your hands.

This is all well and good, but connections to characters are fine only if you have the gameplay to back it up, which brings us back to the origins of the game as a platformer. Every screen could potentially be broken down into grids, where the player knew exactly where Abe would be standing after taking a single step forward, or how far he'd jump when you pressed the 'hop' button. Shadows, an important aspect of the sneaking mechanic, had clearly defined edges so you would never be caught out. Pebbles would fall from the screen above, highlighting where you could jump up to another ledge. Sligs, the game's main enemies, could see across the screen and a single shot from their guns would slay poor Abe. Over time, you learned these rules to build up a picture of what the game expected of you, upping the ante and mixing previously isolated mechanics. Eventually you would experience chase sequences where you would have to run, roll, jump and roll again – all the while your heart would be pounding, but, throughout it all, you knew exactly when every button needed

BLUFFER'S GUIDE

Everything you need to know in five facts



1 It's a 2D platformer with dual emphasis on navigation and puzzles.



2 It sees you saving slaves from the meat processing factory Rupture Farms.



3 It allowed you to possess enemies to shoot other foes, traverse areas and unlock gates.



4 Its message was ecological and strongly critical of corporate greed.



5 It was made by Oddworld Inhabitants, which has left game development in recent years.



△○×□ The finale was a tense affair but incredibly satisfying to complete.



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STANDOUT MOMENT



GETTING UNDER YOUR ENEMIES' SKIN

Possession is nine-tenths of Abe's Oddysee

Possessing your first Slig was a defining moment. Suddenly you had a completely different set of rules and you had to learn – in accordance with the *Oddworld* games – the hard way. The discovery that you could beat Mudokons usually stopped being funny when you beat one to death, but the joy of seeing a Slig explode into pieces that hit the screen never got old.

FURTHER READING



OLDER – FLASHBACK
Made with rotoscoping techniques to create vividly fluid movements, it was a critical and commercial success. *Flashback* is also known for its punishing difficulty.



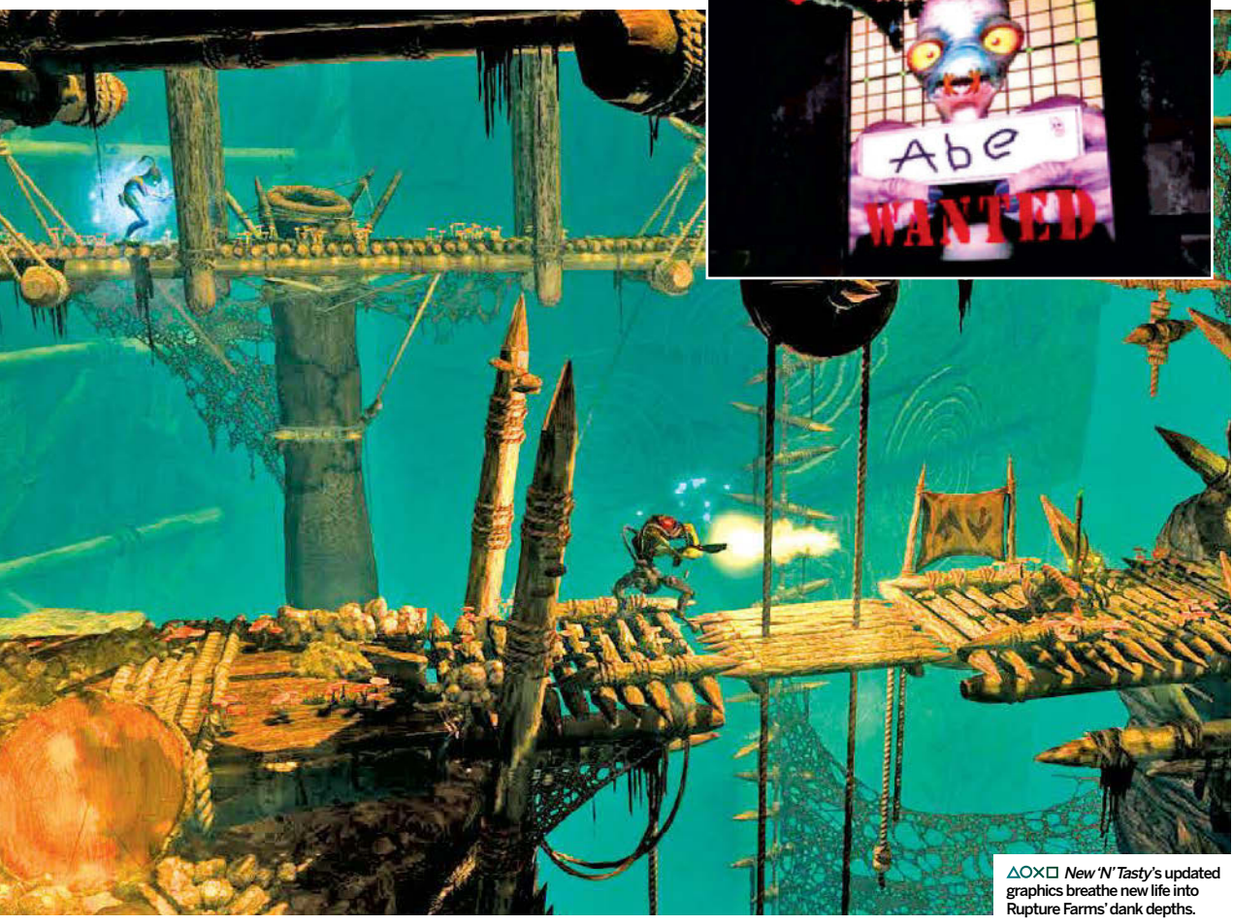
NEWER – ODDWORLD: NEW 'N' TASTY!
A HD remake but with significant changes: the screen scrolls freely and Abe can take more than one hit, but it's still the same quirky and fantastical experience.

to be pressed, so if you failed, you had only yourself to blame. But that was all standard platforming, just done to a very high standard. The other thing that set *Abe's Oddysee* apart from its peers was the 'possession' system, whereby chanting for a short period of time (holding L2 and R2) enabled you to take control of a nearby Slig, giving you access to a whole host of new challenges and solutions. Shooting other Sligs, for instance, became problematic when other Mudokons were in the way, but by using Gamespeak to shout 'Look out!', the Mudokons would cower, allowing you to fire freely over their heads.

And what of the world of Oddworld? The surroundings gave off as much character as the characters themselves, existing as pre-rendered backgrounds behind animated sprites. Rupture Farms, the industrial abattoir and the game's main setting, was grimy, bloody and gritty. The Mudokon temple felt ancient and wild, the sound of your feet grinding dirt and dry leaves selling it. Even the incidental details on a silo in the background spattered by blood from the carcasses falling past it testified to the keen eye of the artists.

In respect to the game's longevity and the people who still sing its praises today, Lanning says, "[The game] being hard gave them something to sink their teeth into, but I think it was the world and its characters that drew them in and kept them there." But Lanning admits that he didn't like how difficult the final game was. He explains that the hand-drawn sprites, while practical with the technology they had available, made adjustments difficult to the point of frustration. "If you make an animation quicker to give the player more time to react then it looks awkward, so you have to balance what looks good versus what plays good." In the end he was pleased that Just Add Water remade the game because it meant Lanning could see the difficulty curve that he had always wanted for the game so people who wanted to play out the story wouldn't be turned off by the harsh difficulty.

That remake, *New 'N' Tasty*, was born out of adoration for the original by a team that









△○×□ *New 'N' Tasty*'s updated graphics breathe new life into Rupture Farms' dank depths.

loved *Oddworld* enough to convince Lanning to let Abe come out of retirement. CEO and founder Stewart Gilray says that the essential ingredient of *Abe's Oddysee* is the humour, without which it just wouldn't be an Abe game. There were a few caveats, though. "There were a few things we decided needed to [change], the biggest of which was probably the ability to control multiple Mudokons as you couldn't in *Abe's Exoddus*. We pulled that mechanic into *New 'N' Tasty* because one of the biggest criticisms I think was that you had to speak to and control each slave one at a time." As fans, making quality of life changes occasionally proves to be painful, but at least in this instance they were perfectly justified.

But underneath the clever mechanics and subtle design is a very serious message, one that Lanning is only too pleased to discuss. He points out the negative portrayal of corporate greed in the game. "For me, as an artistic spirit, I wanted to reflect those things but I didn't want to make a documentary," he says. "If you get into it on a superficial level then you're more likely to go deeper by yourself." Hence the game, and he continues to bemoan governments and civil control and hopes that the efforts of he and his peers in the videogame industry don't go unappreciated.

It's a game of layers, then, as all the best ones are: solid mechanics built on top of solid design built on top of solid desire and passion. It's a game that wanted to communicate a message and had a great time doing it, and arguably succeeded. The recent years have not been kind to Oddworld Inhabitants and it is very unlikely that we'll ever see the studio put out another game quite as defining as *Abe's Oddysee*, owing in part to Lorne Lanning's public dissatisfaction with the videogame industry. But if it is to be the studio's pinnacle then it is quite a pinnacle indeed.

"THERE WERE THINGS WE DECIDED NEEDED TO CHANGE, THE BIGGEST OF WHICH WAS THE ABILITY TO CONTROL MULTIPLE MUDOKONS"



THE BUTT OF ALL JOKES

Bum gasses are universally hilarious, aren't they?

By simply pressing X, Abe could be made to pop one off, causing him and the player endless amusement. But Stewart Gilray says that when making changes to the original design during development of *New 'N' Tasty*, the issue wrinkled a few noses. "One thing that was discussed was the farts," he tells us. "Someone on the team, who shall remain nameless, always felt the farts were moronic, but the rest of us were like, 'Are you crazy!? That is part of Abe!'"

PLAY PLUS

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INTERVIEW

ASCII BUSINESS

Stormcloud Games boss Frank Arnot on leaving mobile behind to reinvent the retro roguelike on PS4 with Brut@l



How is the team enjoying the creative freedom of no longer focusing exclusively on kids' games and mobile titles?
They love it! Long term, the goal was to always work on passion projects – the team spent some time delving into the mobile market before taking stock of what they, as developers, wanted to do. There's nothing wrong with the mobile market, but if your passion is somewhere else, you need to follow that.

Moving onto *Brut@l* was a pretty easy step. The team has worked on some really big console and PC titles so it was very rewarding from a creative point of view, but also really comfortable from a skill set side.

Is there anything in particular that you have learned or established in that time that is being employed on *Brut@l*?
We have some amazing match-three systems in *Brut@l*! I'm joking, hopefully we didn't lose anyone. Come back! Hello? In all seriousness, not really. The platforms, games, approach and time scales are different. We realised that working on what you're passionate about, assuming it's viable, is what you have to do.

How did getting the game revealed at PlayStation Experience come about?
We're fortunate that Sony has such a passion for indies and pushing them on the platform. We got noticed by several members of the US PlayStation division who latched onto the game and really championed us, helping us get all the way to sunny (in comparison to Scotland!) San Francisco. I think with a game like *Brut@l* we stand out due to our art direction, which is great, but we had to make sure the game played well.

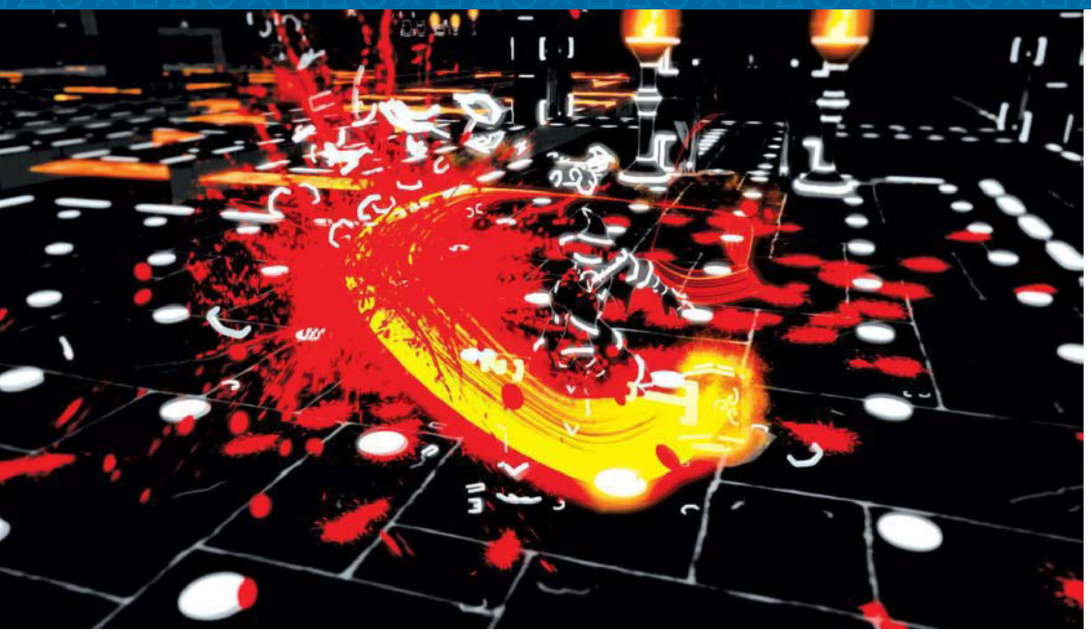
The games *Brut@l* riffs on range from mazes to hardcore stuff like *Dwarf Fortress*. Where on that difficulty spectrum will *Brut@l* fall?
Somewhere in the middle? In all seriousness, we don't have the depth of systems that *Dwarf Fortress* has, so we're not on that side of the spectrum, but we do have some depth to what the user needs to achieve or learn, for example enemy's weaknesses, best weapons to use in certain situations, how and when to effectively use potions and so on.

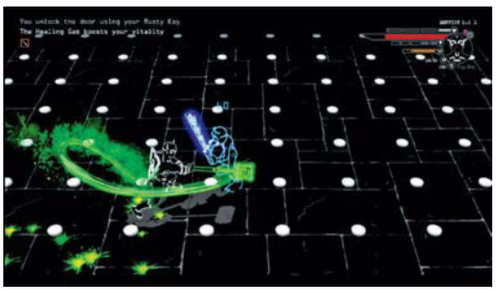
I think we combine very light RPG elements, platforming and permadeath together. So perhaps in the middle is the best way to describe it. We have some strong systems in place that you need to play around with, but they aren't obscure to the point of needing to use a wiki to learn what a certain button does. But on the flip side you can't just grab a sword and breeze through the game in one go.

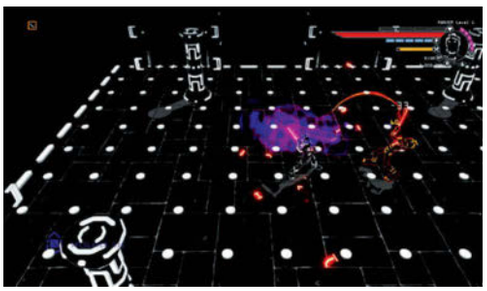
That 'ASCII-come-to-life' style is really cool and novel, but is there any concern that the reference and art style may be lost on younger players entirely?
I don't think so. Or rather, I think even if the relation to classic ASCII is lost, there is still

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ABC, EASY AS 123

Arnot explains the four pillars of Brut@l's crafting system

WEAPON CRAFTING

Everything from the game is built from ASCII, and the weapons are no different. They're all built from these characters and thus in the game world you find two key items: codices, weapons blueprints, and ASCII letters, the building blocks used to make weapons.

WEAPON ENCHANTING

Weapon enchanting applies magical properties to weapons. There are enchanted letters scattered across the world that can be used on weapons, for example fire-enchanted weapons set enemies ablaze, or water weapons freeze enemies for a set amount of time.

TALISMAN CRAFTING

Talismans are rare crafted items – think of them like items that players can equip. Talisman Scrolls are found in the game world and enchanted letters, one of each enchantment, are used to craft these powerful items. These items give buffs such as reduced fire damage.

POTION BREWING

Potion brewing is my favourite! We have ingredients scattered throughout the game world. Once you have the correct combinations, you can brew them to make an unknown potion. The only way to determine what it is and what it does is to drink it or throw it at an enemy.

something unique about the style of *Brut@l*. We had some younger gamers ask if we were inspired by *Tron*, and while we're not, there is a *Tron*-esque feel to the game naturally. I think this, combined with the fact it just looks different, means that even if the connection to ASCII is lost by some gamers, it won't negatively impact us. That's the hope anyway.

Given that the game's dungeons are endlessly replayable; can players expect to find or unlock anything persistent to the character or account that can be used on future runs?

No, we keep the traditional permadeath structure, so once you die, that's it. That said, we do have a system in place to grant extra lives. In *Brut@l*, you collect loot that is spawned randomly across all 26 levels. You can offer this loot to the gods who, if they deem your offer favourable, will grant you an extra life. If they deem your offer insulting, they'll destroy the god altar and take your loot.

This adds a risk/reward system – you want that extra life, but you don't want to offer ALL of your gold as you can find more of these god altars later on in the game. You can obtain up to nine extra lives, so while when you die on your last life that's it over, you can actually keep your current run going by using the loot that you collect to acquire extra lives.

> "I CAN'T WAIT TO SHARE GREAT COMMUNITY LEVELS"

What are the main benefits of the user-generated content approach you're going for with the dungeon editing tools?

I can't wait to share great community levels, the QA team can't wait to make hard-as-nails levels and people we met at PSX couldn't wait to try levels from their fellow gamers.

Overall, I think this just says that it adds a community to the game, adds more depth and keeps the product fresh and alive long after it's released. In terms of flexibility with the editor, we offer a lot of options – you can create your own dungeon, placing all rooms, decorations, loot drops and enemies, or you can make a platforming level that challenges players to time jumps, runs and attacks. Myself personally, I'm awful with the editor, but our team makes a lot of great levels that both stick to traditional dungeon designs but also break away from it – the stand-out being a level where over 30 Minotaurs are chasing you and will one-hit-kill you, thus your goal is to make it from point A to point B while never looking back or stopping!

Is it true that damage numbers make everything better?

Yes. Yes, this is true.



EXTENDED PLAY

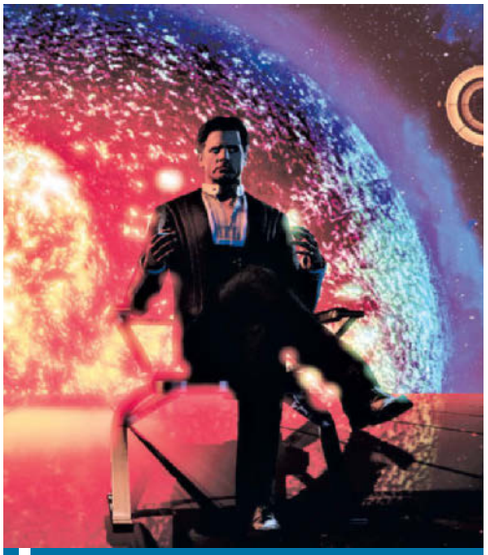
MASS EFFECT

While we are waiting for Mass Effect Andromeda to release at the end of this year, there's a whole universe of Mass Effect for us to explore...



THE ORIGINAL

■ **WE KNOW THAT** a lot of you PlayStation fans won't have played the first *Mass Effect* game because of the fact that it didn't originally release on PS3, meaning that there are a whole contingent of *Mass Effect* players who only ever played *ME2* and *ME3*. However, the first *Mass Effect* did end up appearing on PSN in 2012 to coincide with the release of the *Mass Effect Trilogy*. For those of you who loved *ME2* and *ME3*, it might be worth going back to where it all began. Just be aware that there's far more of an RPG focus in the original game, but hey, maybe that's precisely what you're looking for.



GO ROGUE

■ **ONE OF THE** brilliant things about the *Mass Effect* games is that the story can play out so differently depending on the choices that you make when playing it. Your comrades might live or die, or, a bigger scale, you can choose whether to save or condemn entire species to death. This makes it an excellent title to return to and replay – you can see things that you didn't first time around. If you stuck to your morals on your first playthrough, why not try going for something complexly different and go for a bit of role-play by playing the game as the most evil, cruel and psychopathic version of Shepard possible? It'll ensure that you see the *Mass Effect* universe in a whole new way.



EXPLORE THE UNIVERSE

■ **IF YOU'RE A** hardcore *Mass Effect* fan, there are loads of ways that you can immerse yourself in its universe and expand your knowledge of its lore. *Mass Effect: Revelation* was the first novel released set in the *ME* universe and that was followed by three more. Then there are the comics, of which there have been ten released over the years.



GALAXY AT WAR

■ **IF YOU LIKE** *Mass Effect* and *Risk*, then there is something perfect for you: *Risk: Mass Effect Galaxy At War Edition*. It's pretty much what you would expect: a version of *Risk* that's been themed up with *Mass Effect* species and factions. As far as we can tell, you'll have to import it from the US, but if you're hardcore fan of *Mass Effect* and want a version of *Risk* based on it, we're guessing you won't mind!



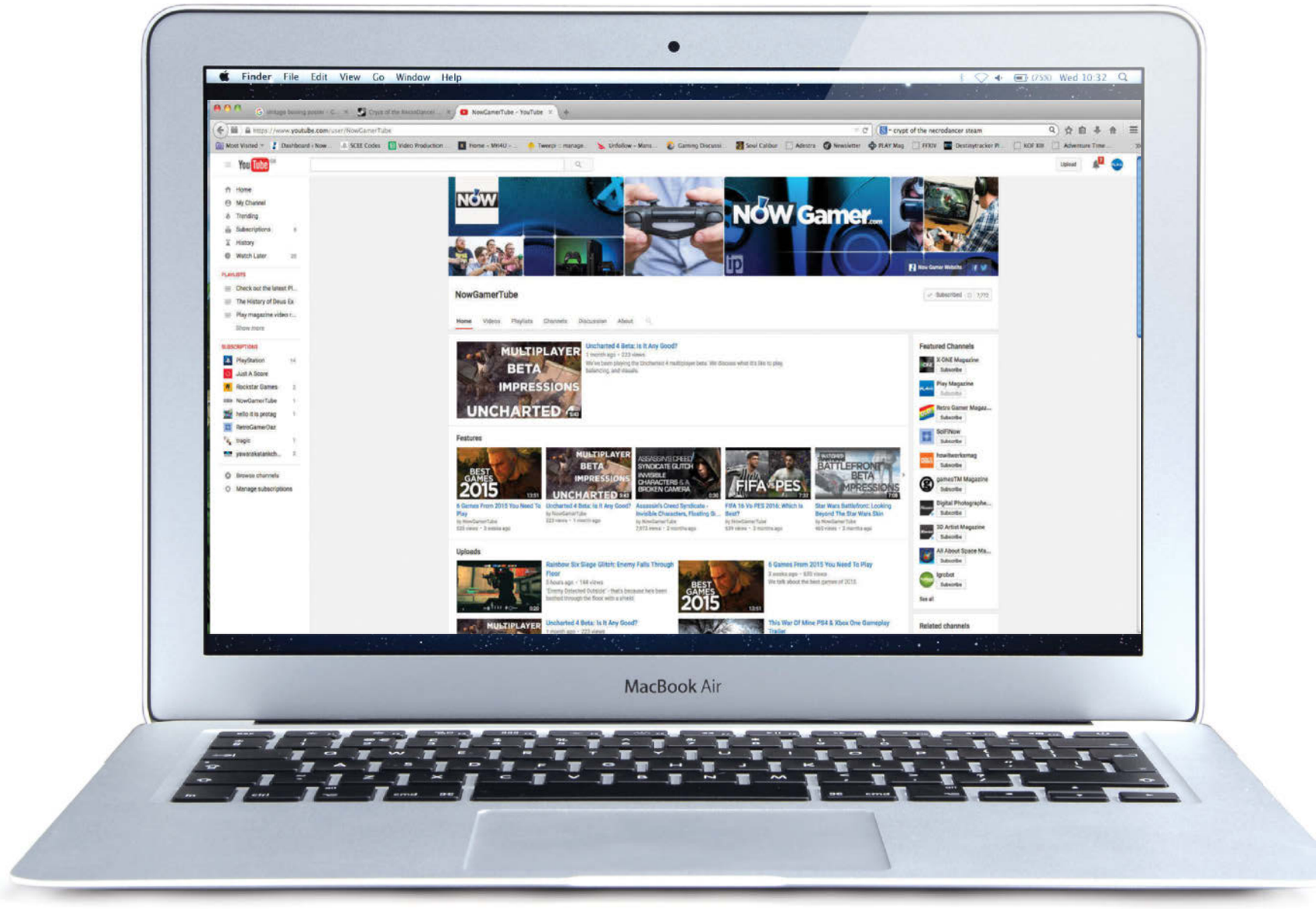
DLC

■ **IF YOU'RE STARTING** to get the itch to return to *Mass Effect*, there are loads of options for making your experience feel a little fresher, thanks to the fact that BioWare has released a load of DLC. There is mission based-DLC like *Overlord* for *ME2* and *Leviathan* for *ME3*, and even the option of getting a new character in *Kasumi – Stolen Memory*. At least, you'll want to download the extended cut DLC for *ME3* that aimed to adjust the criticism levelled at that game's ending. It doesn't take much to boot a save from the end of the game and take a look at how BioWare has tweaked the conclusion.

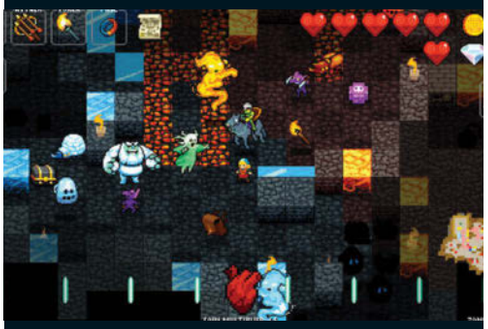
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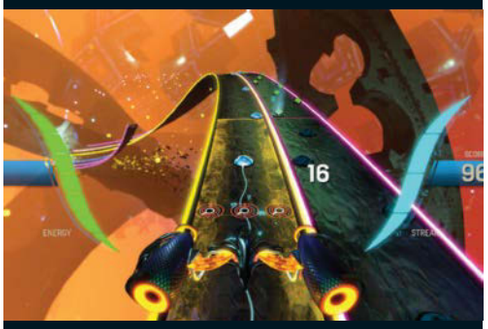


2016'S DARK HORSES



THERE ARE PLENTY of lists out there that run down the biggest and best upcoming games, so here's one that champions the underdogs...

AMPLITUDE



SO IT TURNS out that we're really damn good at Harmonix's rhythm-action revival. Tune in if you want to be shown how it's done.

RAINBOW SIX SIEGE



STRUGGLING TO GET to grips with Ubisoft's unforgiving team-based shooter? Check out our handy guides and watch your skills grow!

SHARING



PLAYSTATION 4 DIRECTORY

Every PS4 owner needs to know what games are worth owning. Our PS4 directory is the ideal tool for building your library.



THE INDIE 100

Every must-play indie game on PlayStation is right here – if you love indies, this will help you fill any gaps in your collection.



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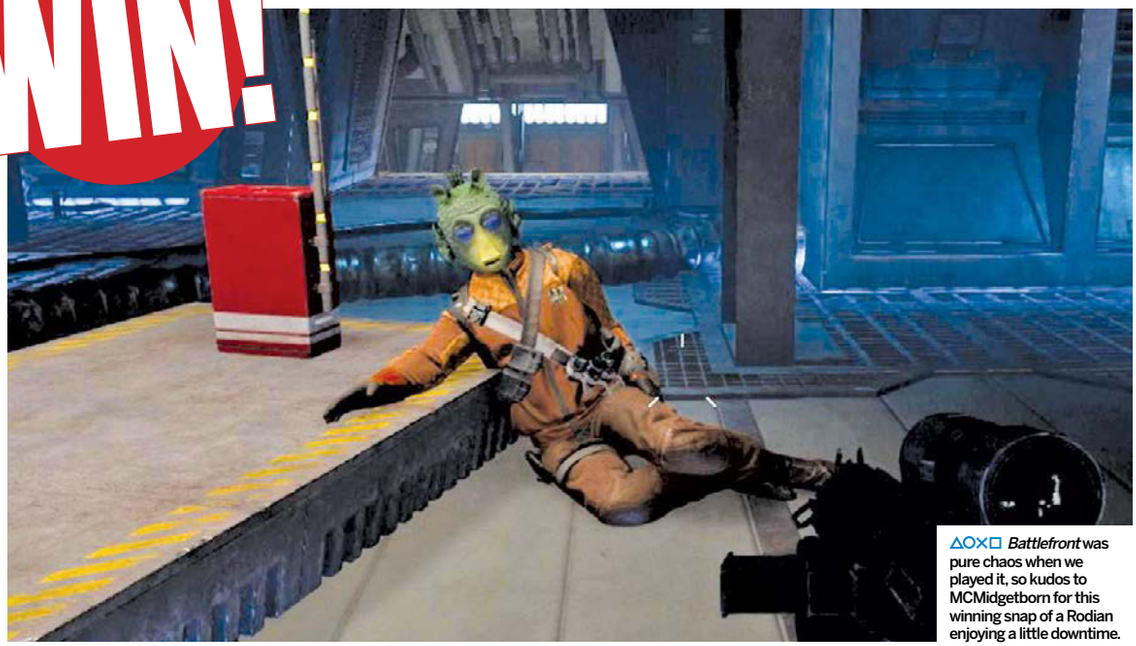
■ **THE PS4'S NEW** Community feature is a great way of finding like-minded players that share your interests. That's why we've set up our own **Play** Community where you can join our game sessions, share your best screenshots, win prizes, and connect with other PlayStation fans. Come and join our ever-growing community of readers today!

HOW TO JOIN

1 Search for Play_Mag_UK in the Friends menu, select our profile, then navigate down to 'Communities'.

2 Press X to open the **Play** Community, then press X again to join it. Welcome to the family!

WIN! YOUR BEST SCREENS



△○×□ *Battlefront* was pure chaos when we played it, so kudos to MCMidgetborn for this winning snap of a Rodian enjoying a little downtime.



△○×□ It's not every day you get a yacht named after you. Thanks for thinking of us, Mausbrod!

△○×□ Lots of crazy stuff happens in *GTA V*, but how the hell did that guy get up there? Maybe chuvver65 can tell us...



TROPHY GUIDE

PS PLUS TROPHY GUIDE

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

PLATFORM: PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 51 1 3 5 42

■ **THE FIRST STEP** on this undertaking will be choosing your class – we recommend Warrior or Rogue to help with the combat Trophies here. Play through the main game and make sure you search every nook to collect all of the party members (for 'Recruiter') and unlock all locations (for 'Traveler'). It's worth noting you'll need to complete the game *three times* if you want the Platinum, but if you want to get as many Trophies as possible on your first run, save before each 'major' decision then reload and make the other call. There are four endings, and if you save prior to the final battle, you should be able to see them all from one playthrough. You can also romance up to four partners per game to get you closer to 'Hopelessly Romantic'.





GRIM FANDANGO

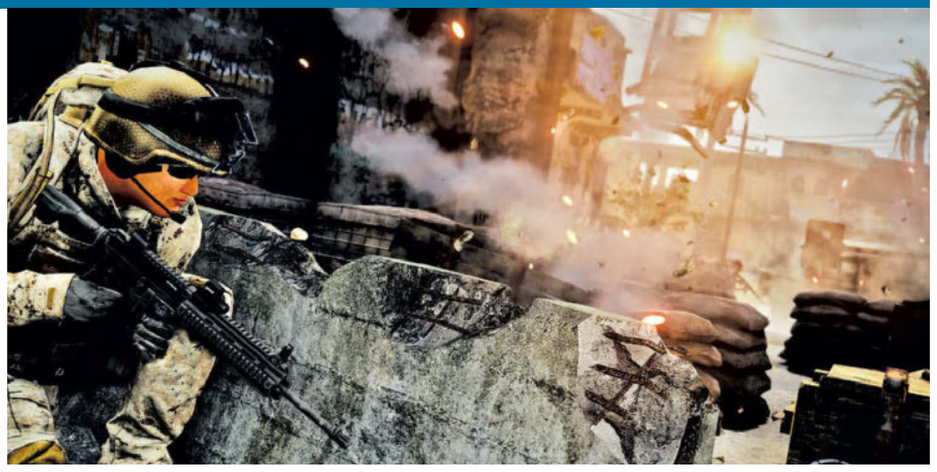
PLATFORM: PS4/VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 1/5
TROPHIES: 48 1 2 7 38

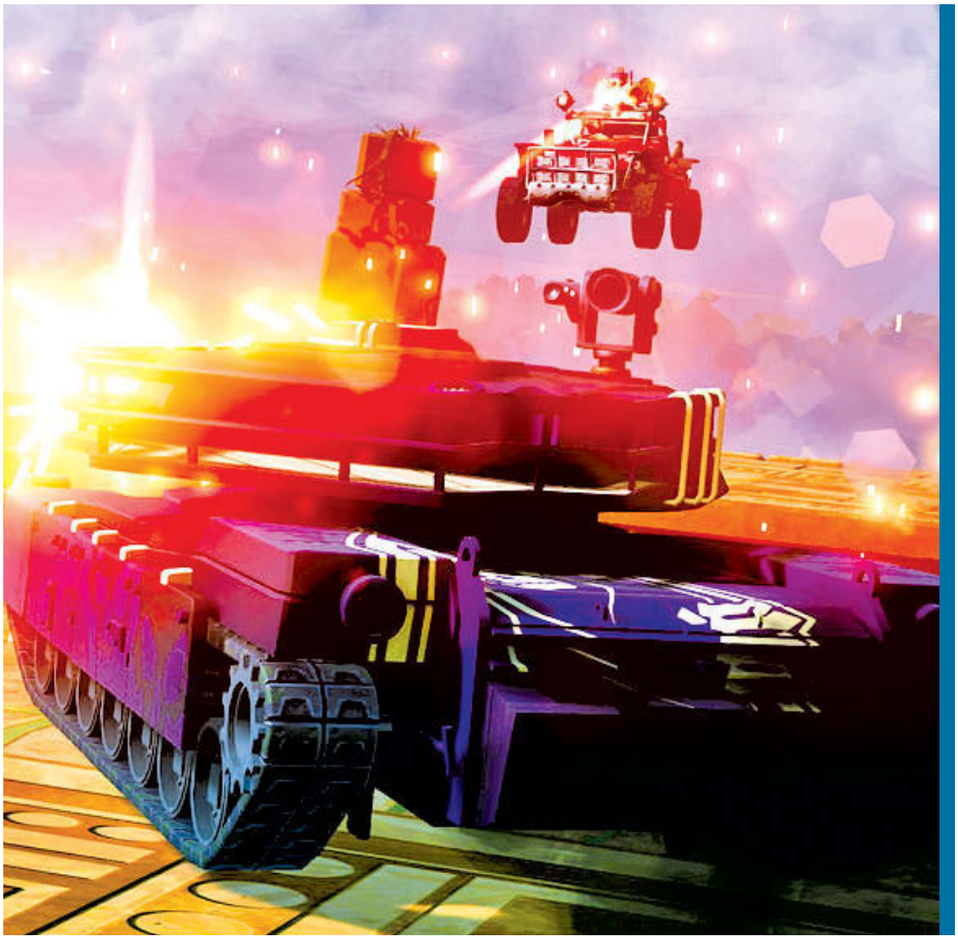
■ **THE TRICK TO** getting all the Trophies in *Grim Fandango* is just *talk*. Talk to everyone, talk to everything, keep hammering X on everything you see. Exhaust all those speech options, collect all the items and remain inquisitive. Also, make a new save point at the start of every year – it'll be handy if you need to clean any outlying Trophies up once you've finished. The most irritating Trophies to go back and get are also the easiest to miss, awkwardly enough: 'ME, ME, ME-ME-ME!' requires going back to the bees once you've left jail (you'll know when that is, in-game) and 'chanting' with them by hitting X at the right time. You'll need to chant for a while, and *don't leave* until that Trophy pops: you'll never get to go back to this point.

MEDAL OF HONOR WARFIGHTER

PLATFORM: PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 51 1 2 10 38

■ **BOOT THE CAMPAIGN** on Hard and start making your way through the story to unlock the three stackable difficulty-related Trophies. Hard mode is basically Easy, anyway, at least compared to the Hardcore and Tier 1 settings you'll have to do later: checkpoints are frequent and you can soak up bullets for days. On Hard, expect the story to last around six hours. You'll net 34 Bronzes during this step, and a further three Silvers. You'll have to do the game twice more on the remaining difficulties if you want two more Silvers and a Gold, and the remaining Gold and five Silver require some online action (the servers are still alive, don't worry). You can boost these, but they shouldn't take long to achieve anyway.





HARDWARE: RIVALS

PLATFORM: PS4 **DIFFICULTY:** 2/5
TROPHIES: 42 1 4 8 29

■ **YOU READY FOR** a grind? Whilst you *can* boost this game in Private Matches with at least one other friend online, you *can't* earn experience this way – and a lot of the Trophies revolve around leveling up and hitting certain growth targets. But, if you're willing to jump online and play easy matches for the experience points, you can get

> "A LOT OF THE TROPHIES REVOLVE AROUND LEVELING UP"

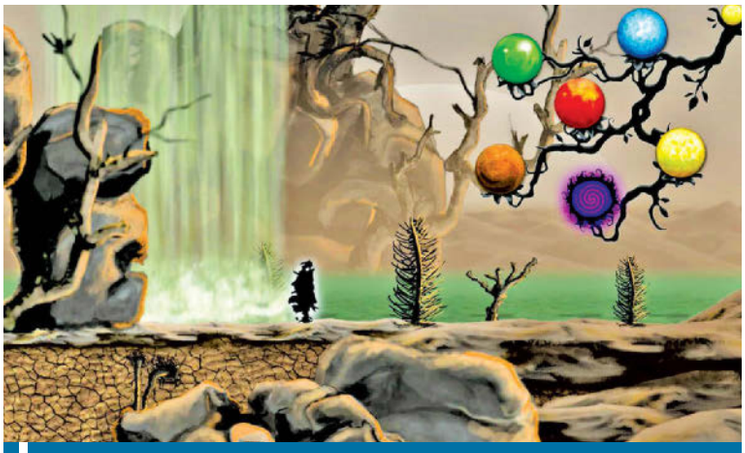
loads of Trophies with a pal: killstreaks, airborne kills, special weapon bonuses – these can all be achieved without too much hassle. Getting multi-kill bonuses can be a little harder – you might need to recruit more friends to a private match for that. By the time you're nearing the completion of the 1,000 kills Trophy, you'll easily be level 25 and have cleared up the rest of the miscellaneous Trophies – not too hard a Platinum to get, really!

LEGENDS OF WAR: PATTON

PLATFORM: VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 1/5
TROPHIES: 21 1 8 6 6

■ **LIKE A BUDGET** *Total War*-cum-*Civ*, this game is a turn-based strategy game set in World War II. There are no difficulty Trophies, so if you're playing this to boost your rewards, hit up Easy. To get 'Heroic Leader' and 'Supreme Commander', you'll need to clear ten stages perfectly – this includes some maps where *none* of your units can die. Play smart, make good use of cover and potshot enemies when you can. Heal after each mission, and *never* use all your move points in a turn: there are often ambushes you'll need to retreat from. If even *one* of your units is destroyed in any mission from Operation 4 on, restart the level – there's no point continuing with a death on your hands.





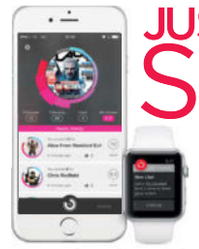
NIHILUMBRA

PLATFORM: VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 2/5
TROPHIES: 12 0 1 4 7

■ **THERE ARE TWO** rewards on offer for simply playing through the vanilla difficulty of the game and completing it. Whilst you're on this playthrough, we recommend familiarising yourself with the Trophies and trying to get everything *not* Void Mode-specific: burning multiple enemies, bouncing bullets 20 times, resisting absorption and other miscellaneous tasks are easily achieved here. Once you've netted the eight 'bonus' Trophies, head into Void Mode and try the game again. It's a bit... twitchier this time. It won't be easy, but it's doable. You'll get yourself a Gold and Silver for your trouble.

PLAY PLUS PlayList

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT A GAME SCORED THEN THESE PAGES ARE FOR YOU



JUST A SCORE

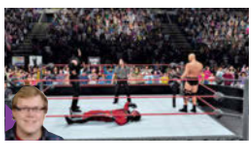
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LET'S PLAY... FIGHTING GAMES



LUKE ALBIGÉS
VIRTUA FIGHTER 5: FINAL SHOWDOWN

10 Ladies and gents, the perfect 3D fighting game. It's all about creativity and reactions rather than flashy canned combos, making for new experiences every single round. Glorious.



LIAM WARR
WWE 2K16

6 Best for years now, still weak overall. The new reversal meter where it limits you is great as it finally meant I was able to beat my 11-year-old cousin's cat-like reversal reactions for the first time in three years .



DREW SLEEP
ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

7 I hated vanilla *SFIV*. It felt clunky to me. I tried *Arcade Edition*, but that had Hakan. But this edition redeems *SFIV* for me. It probably has something to do with Ryu and friends dressing up as stupid things.



PAUL WALKER-EMIG
MORTAL KOMBAT X

8 *Though Street Fighter II* fascinated me as a child, I never got into fighting games. So I credit *Mortal Kombat X* for finally giving me a way into the genre and starting to understand how it all works!

PS4



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THIS MONTH'S NEW ENTRIES

The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

Star Wars Battlefront
Bloodborne: The Old Hunters
Rainbow Six Siege
Just Cause 3
Superbeat Xonic

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**denotes import review*

TOP TEN SPECIAL MOVES



Hadoken *Street Fighter*



Dragon Punch *Street Fighter*



Spear *Mortal Kombat*



In Your Face! *Guilty Gear*



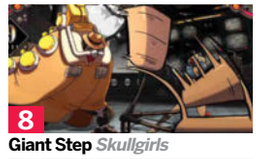
Spinning Piledriver *Street Fighter*



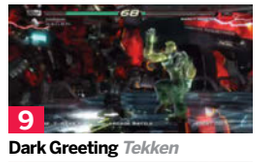
Flying Dragon Kick *Mortal Kombat*



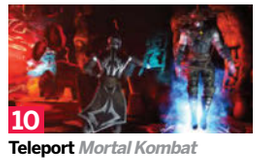
Summon Suffering *SoulCalibur*



Giant Step *Skullgirls*



Dark Greeting *Tekken*



Teleport *Mortal Kombat*

PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LOVE...



DARK SOULS

PLAY: BLOODBORNE

If you've got a PS4, why wouldn't you want to play a game that is one of the best that's been released on the console? That goes doubly if you've had fun with the *Dark Souls* games before, too.



RIDICULOUS FINISHING MOVES

PLAY: GUILTY GEAR XRD: -SIGN-

Firing someone out of a cannon from an airship; giving someone a pretty eye transplant; turning someone into a pool ball... these are just a few examples of *Guilty Gear*'s crazy instant kills.



TWIN PEAKS

PLAY: DEADLY PREMONITION

This surreal *Twin Peaks*-like mystery/comedy/horror plays like a cross between *Shenmue* and the *Clock Tower* series. It's also probably one of the oddest games on PS3.



TELLTALE

PLAY: SAM & MAX: THE DEVIL'S PLAYHOUSE

The Walking Dead is the game that brought Telltale Games to everyone's attention, but the games the studio made before that are worth a shot, including *Sam & Max*.



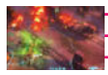
SAMURAI SWORDS

PLAY: MURAMASA REBIRTH

A gorgeous-looking 2D action-RPG that sees you cutting across your screen with various fancy blades, *Muramasa Rebirth* is an excellent excuse to boot up your Vita and slice up some bad guys. It's so very pretty...

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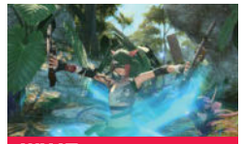


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**denotes import review*

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...

Watch out! Games!



WHAT (have they been playing?)

FFXIV: A Realm Reborn

WHY (was it chosen?)

Yeah, I'm still lost in Eorzea

LUKE ALBIGÉS

NOT CONTENT WITH crumbling under the weight of my own addiction, I took things to the next level late last year by becoming an enabler and roping in a bunch of others to share in the fun. Having some able to join on PC thanks to the wonders of cross-platform play is awesome, and reminds me of the one game that will be able to drag me away from this gorgeous fantasy world. And yes, it's the game that graces the cover of this very issue. *Street Fighter V* already has me hooked and I'm confident that it'll succeed where the likes of *Just Cause 3* and *Rainbow Six Siege* failed, setting me free from *FFXIV* at last. Well, for a bit – I'm obviously still going to be heading back in to do my daily quests and whatnot...



WHAT (have they been playing?)

Rainbow Six Siege

WHY (was it chosen?)

It's intense

PAUL WALKER-EMIG

I reckon I might get bored of *Siege* before too long given that all its modes feel the same, but right now that doesn't matter one bit. The reason it doesn't matter is because, when you've got good teammates, it is the most rewarding shooter I've played in ages. Get down to a one-on-one situation where you know your team is watching you and you'll see what I'm talking about!

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UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

Naughty Dog spills the beans on the biggest game on PlayStation 4

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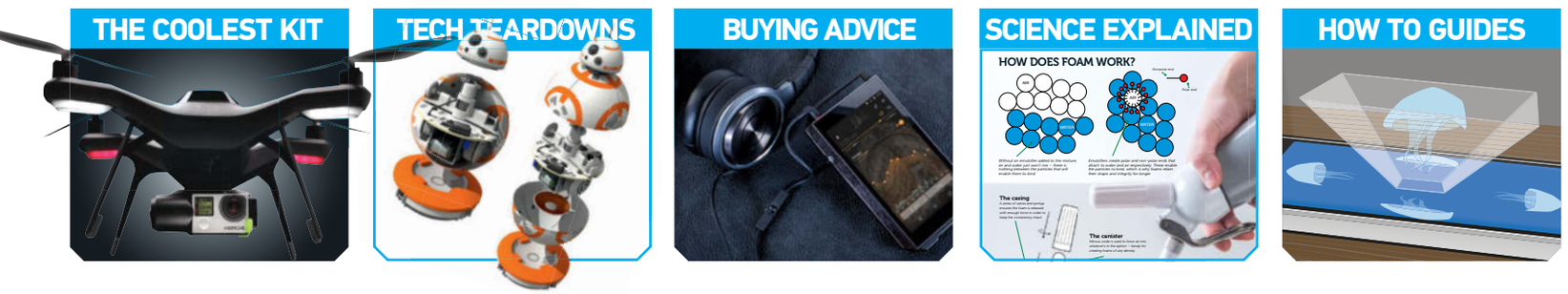


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A closer look at PlayStation VR's first essential exclusive

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Everything you need to know about the best fighter on PS4

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS SÉBASTIEN LOEB RALLY EVO

FULL PLAYTEST ▢ EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW △ BETTER THAN DIRT?



SÉBASTIEN LOEB RALLY EVO

ROADS? WHERE WE'RE GOING, WE DON'T NEED ROADS

We head out to Milestone's studio to get under the hood of its rally revolution

It's a strangely fertile time for rally games at the moment. With *WRC 5* already out of the gates and the much-anticipated *Dirt Rally* looming large on the horizon, Milestone's *Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo* is facing some unusually stiff competition.

But if the pressure is on, somebody clearly forgot to tell Milestone's head of software development, Michele Caletti. During a chat that took place on the terrace of the studio's Milan HQ on a foggy December morning, Caletti revealed that while competition is always welcome, the current crop of contenders don't actually pose any real threat to the team's latest off-road effort. "*WRC 5* surprised us," he said, "because it's better than we expected. However, it's evidently a first attempt. It's clear that it's got less content, the physics are simpler and it hasn't got the depth of our game. It's a good start, though, and we hope to have good competition in the future."

WRC 5 is the first official *WRC* game in a decade to not have Milestone at its helm, and it seems pretty clear that tight brand restrictions are one of the main reasons that the Italian studio decided to relinquish control of the *WRC* franchise



△○×□ In Milestone's *WRC* games, special stages were all a similar length. In *Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo*, they vary from 3km to 10km.

"WE KNOW THE LIMITATIONS, THE DIFFICULTIES... SOMETIMES, IT FELT LIKE WE WERE IN A CAGE"

to French upstart Kylotonn. "Having done other *WRC* titles in the past, we know the limitations, the difficulties... and sometimes, it felt like we were in a cage."

So *Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo* isn't confined by the same strict guidelines and constraints as Milestone's previous *WRC* releases, and you can tell. This isn't just another rally game – it's far broader and more varied than the competition. "Rally is a passion, and fans not only want it bigger, they don't want it to be focused solely on the present," explained Caletti. This means that rather than exclusively obsessing over the latest vehicles, Milestone has instead ensured that the vast roster of cars includes fan favourites from years and seasons past. There are cars from the notorious 'Group B' era ("missiles with wheels," according to Caletti), A8 vehicles from the Nineties and fuel-guzzling monsters custom-built expressly for hill climb events.

The game's more open and flexible nature also has a great deal to do with Sébastien Loeb himself. Although he's widely known as the most successful WRC driver in history – having won the world championship a whopping nine times in a row – rally fans know that his interests stretch way beyond WRC, and Milestone has been keen to exploit that. Among other things, this means hill climb events and rallycross, the latter

△○×□ The finished game is going to offer up eight rally events in total, each featuring eight special stages.

of which was never allowed to appear in official *WRC* releases. For the uninitiated, rallycross events take place on closed circuits and each driver has access to a single 'Joker lap' per race, which is essentially a shortcut that can be used at any time. Faster and way more frantic than traditional rally races, rallycross events look like they'll make for a gripping (and unusual) palate cleanser between the standard championships.

Milestone's claims that it is making something vaguely definitive would sound like wishful thinking if it didn't coincide with the company's huge recent success. Although still technically an indie studio, Milestone's profits leapt





DISSING THE DIRT

Michele Caletti on SLRE's competition

While some may not find it surprising that *WRC 5* didn't get an entirely ringing endorsement from Milestone's Michele Caletti, it's more surprising to note that he and his team aren't in the slightest bit intimidated by Codemasters' much-hyped *Dirt Rally* either. "It's good, sometimes it's incredibly good," he said. "But it's got some lows here and there. For example, their Pikes Peak... it's not to the level of the other assets in the game, in my opinion. Some cars are not so good to drive, and it's drastic in some situations. If you remove all of the supports and assists, on some special stages you can do one turn, break the car, and then you have no choice but to retire. Our game can be drastic too, but I think *Dirt Rally* is too drastic. It has evidently been aimed at a core audience, and we don't want to go overboard on players. But it's like any sport: having competition is great."



△○×□ Fans have demanded more customisation options, and both cars and liveries are heavily customisable from the get-go.



from €2.5 million in 2012 to €21.1 million in 2014, and this has resulted in a brand-new engine and some of the latest development tech being utilised here. Make no mistake though, some of these new investments didn't come easily. "We fought for new shaders, we fought for a new polygon budget," said Caletti. "There had to be a difference between this game and the other games out now. We wanted to take a very evident step."

Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo's development was shaped not only by the hardcore fans, but by the iconic driver himself. Loeb took his involvement very seriously indeed, and despite the fact that he smashed an in-house record on only his second attempt at the wheel, he was full of invaluable ideas and feedback. "You may imagine him sitting here, playing for five minutes and then leaving," said Caletti. "But when he came, he stayed, and he played to the end... we had to kick him out!" Most of Loeb's notes concerned the game's physics, but he also wanted to make sure that the pacenotes were as realistic as possible. "Sébastien has to trust the pacenotes, because he doesn't have time to read the road all the time. He has to trust his co-driver."

In Milestone's previous racers, pacenote audio was recorded one word at a time and then chained together to fit

every possible context, which meant that the instructions often sounded robotic and unrealistic. Now, each and every pacenote has been recorded individually, which apparently involved around 30 times more work. But while the robotic quality is now gone, the realism factor is still hindered somewhat because the voices belong to real-life rally drivers. This is fine for the most part, but when things get really tense, the drivers' ultra-chilled vocal style makes it feel like you're late delivering a pizza, not on the verge of losing a vital championship.

Loeb also has his very own game mode, which is the centrepiece of the package. Covering several different eras and fifteen decisive years, the chapters stretch from 'The Early Days' through to 'The All-Time Greatest', as you tackle 27 of the most pivotal events in the driver's career, all interspersed with exclusive interview clips. These videos are surprisingly candid and personal, and Loeb doesn't shy away from some of the difficulties he has faced during his career. This isn't just background for each race; these videos purport to tell the driver's life story in shorthand. "I don't think you can look at today's rally without acknowledging and celebrating what Sébastien Loeb achieved," said Caletti. "But it's also about improving rally's cultural awareness, and helping people to learn more about this sport."

While the game's expanded gameplay settings suggest that it will be able to please a wide spectrum of racing fans, Loeb's close involvement meant that Milestone were able to focus on steering wheel play like never before, and extensive mods are on offer that allow players to tinker with everything from traction control and mild steering assists to detailed gear ratios and camber angles. There's no damage indicator on the in-game display either, which means that whether you lose a bumper or incur some serious fender damage, you're only notified by how your



TALKING 'BOUT LAST GENERATION

Why SLRE is only possible on PS4

While *WRC 5* very recently launched on both PS3 and PS4, the upcoming *Dirt Rally* was only ever going to be released on PS4. Similarly, Michele Caletti revealed that the possibility of seeing *Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo* on PS3 basically never existed. "We needed to get away from the limitations of the older platforms," he said. "We have been working with a new set of assets. After fighting for those new shaders and our new polygon budgets, the effort required to port the game back to older platforms would have been totally overwhelming. I don't think we could have done [it] justice." The first casualty would have been the game's sense of speed. "The higher resolution means that there is more detail in the environments, so there's more stuff moving fast. The narrow roads improve this too. We could not have achieved this on PS3."



△○×□ Loeb himself extensively played the game, providing feedback.



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△○×□ You can test-drive every car from the main menu, and race around the game's 'proving ground' area. Loading times are basically non-existent.







△○×□ You can launch into free camera mode at any point during a single-player race. Again, loading times basically aren't there.

vehicle handles and how it sounds. Milestone wants players to be "one-to-one with reality," and while accessibility is a key component, the studio knows that it's possible to take accessibility too far. "We are not trying to sell *Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo*, or any Milestone game, to *Candy Crush Saga* players. But if you enjoy racing games, this is for you. We don't just give you a licence. We give you the cars, the background, the drivers… we give you the sport."

So while the control options offer enough to please just about everyone, there is nothing fanciful or casual about the actual racing. Fans of Milestone's earlier efforts have always been militantly against anything simplified or arcade-like, and the team's habit of blending real tracks with fictional ones has been abandoned: these tracks are painstakingly realistic, and taxing narrows have not been widened to appease players who are more used to the likes of *Need For Speed*. In addition to being as close as possible to the real-life raceways, the tracks have been carefully chosen to provide players with the most varied selection. Sweden is twisty and icy, Italy offers smooth dry tarmac while Wales provides treacherous mud and rain. Every one of the game's 300 kilometres can be raced backwards, and the perennial choice of morning, noon and night is effectively a set of difficulty tiers; with night races offering up the most bruising and relentless degree of challenge.

With its more free-form structure (you can enter competitions in any order and use credits to buy or rent cars as you see fit) and its generous spread of modes, the stage is set for what could be Milestone's smartest and most intensely pleasing racer yet. "The designers are very happy with the physics, the artists are incredibly happy artistically and, overall, we are just very, *very* pleased with it," Caletti said in summary. "It's a very strong experience, and I think it's something that many different kinds of players will be able to approach and enjoy."

"WE ARE NOT TRYING TO SELL SLRE OR ANY MILESTONE GAME TO CANDY CRUSH PLAYERS"

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XBOX ONE



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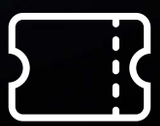
That's the equivalent to:



A PINT OF BEER



A STEAK PIE



1/3 OF A CINEMA TICKET



A MAGAZINE



A FAST FOOD MEAL



1/2 A CD

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